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Thesis

JOHN DOS PASSOS' CONTRIBUTION OF NEW TECHNIQUES TO THE AMERICAN NOVEL

by

John Stacy Beebe
(A.B., University of California at Los Angeles, 1947)
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to describe and to interpret the innovations in literary techniques which John Dos Passos has developed in his novels. Whether or not his technical inventions were actually worthwhile contributions to the art of the novel perhaps cannot be positively ascertained at this time. However, it is certain that Dos Passos has succeeded in creating numerous original and startling effects in his writings.

If, in the rest of the twentieth century, novelists and critics find that the novel is increased in scope and effectiveness by the use of some of the Dos Passos techniques, then it may be safely said that Dos Passos' inventions have been valuable ones.

At any rate, regardless of the fact that Dos Passos' contributions may not come to be regarded as major steps in the evolution of current and future prose fiction, it seems plausible that his work will continue to be of interest to the literary historian. The work is worthy of examining at this time because of its qualities which set it apart from so much of contemporary literature.

Chapter I

THE CHIEF INFLUENCES UPON DOS PASSOS' WRITING

John Dos Passos was born in Chicago on January 14, 1896. His father, the son of a Portuguese immigrant, was a lawyer and a writer upon politico-legal problems. Dos Passos' mother was a member of an old Maryland-Virginia family. His parents took their only child with them upon all of their trips about the North American Continent and Europe. Dos Passos attended grammar school in England; he received some of his secondary education at Choate School in Connecticut; he was graduated cum laude from Harvard in the class of 1916.

Malcolm Cowley has attached the following significance to Dos Passos' college years: that Dos Passos and his classmates helped to mark the beginning of the collegiate era which was later known as the epoch of the Harvard aesthetes.

> The aesthetes themselves were not philosophers; they did not seek to define their attitudes; but most of them would have subscribed to the following propositions: That the cultivation and expression of his own sensibility are the only justifiable ends for a poet. That originality is his principal virtue. That society is hostile, stupid and unmanageable; it is the world of the philistines, from which it is the poet's duty and privilege to remain aloof. That the poet is always misunderstood by the world. He should, in fact, deliberately

make himself misunderstandable, for
the greater glory of art.[1]

It is interesting to speculate upon Cowley's opinions in regard to the degree in which they apply to Dos Passos. However, this paper is concerned chiefly with the Dos Passos who wrote lengthy novels, not with the author of the treatises on society appearing in The Harvard Monthly and The Dial.

In 1917 Dos Passos joined the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Service in France, and in 1918 he served with a Red Cross ambulance unit in Italy. After only a short period of duty in the latter area, he returned to France where he enlisted as a private in the U. S. Army Medical Corps. It was from his experiences in the World War that he drew the material used in writing One Man's Initiation--1917, Three Soldiers, and parts of Nineteen Nineteen.

Dos Passos studied anthropology in Paris, at the Sorbonne, after the war. He visited Spain and other more remote parts of Europe as a correspondent for the London Daily Herald. He took notes of everything he saw; he drew pictures, both literal and figurative, of scenes in his

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1 Malcolm Cowley. Literary Opinion in America. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1937, p. 496.

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1 Malcolm Cowley, Literary Opinion in America. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1937, p. 498.

travels.

He had sometimes thought of becoming an architect. He was interested in painting, history, and social problems too. His adolescent years had seen him making use of Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire as his Bible. He grew to believe that history was more interesting and more alive than fiction. His many adventures in foreign lands caused him to be acutely aware of the importance of understanding the history and culture of a nation before attempting to understand the men and women living in it in the here and now.

In his travels during the 1920's, Dos Passos visited the Balkans, Russia, and the Near East. He recorded all he saw for further use in his books of fiction, essays, and poetic travel tales. While in Europe he became interested in the work of Blaise Cendrars, the French poet and novelist. Cendrars was a Parisian by birth, but a citizen and a diarist of the world by preference. Perhaps Dos Passos saw in this literary figure the sort of man he would like to become himself. He eulogized the writer in an essay entitled "Homer of the Transsiberian"; he believed that Cendrars was seeking to express in his poetry and prose the sound, the texture, the rhythm of modern life, the attitudes toward speed and distance that creations like the Transsiberian railroad locomotive seemed to foster

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in modern minds.

> We need sons of Homer going about the world beating into some kind of human rhythm the shrieking hulla-ballo, making us less afraid.[1]

Cendrars had traveled in the United States and had written extensively of American nineteenth century life. He had endowed one of his literary devices with the name "Kodak." In 1930 Dos Passos amplified Cendrars' technique for portraying scenic impressions in literature with his own innovation--"The Camera Eye."

Other influences similar to that of Cendrars upon Dos Passos' work were derived from the contacts Dos Passos made in the Gertrude Stein circle of young intellectuals in post-1918 France. It may have been at this time that Dos Passos decided upon a novelist's career; but he did not at that time, nor has he since, lost sight of his other interests. He felt that a novelist should be an "architect of history," a recorded and organizer of fiction and non-fiction materials. Exposition and narrative with no decorative literary embellishments were his keynotes. Truth and justice in representing facts upon the printed page seems to have been his goal. Critics have found a battleground upon the question as to whether or not Dos Passos has actually achieved such a goal.

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1 John Dos Passos. "Homer of the Transsiberian," Saturday Review of Literature, III (Oct. 16, 1926), 222.

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Massachusetts which apparently disturbed his sense of truth and justice to a large degree; he was arrested and temporarily jailed for taking part in a picketing demonstration on behalf of Sacco and Vanzetti. Dos Passos was confined in the same Boston jail cell with Michael Gold, editor of The New Masses. From Gold and from other left-wing politico-literary figures, Dos Passos developed an increasing interest in world labor movements.

Dos Passos had been interested in social problems before he met Gold; his work for The Harvard Monthly proves this. He had pondered the theory of a collectivist society and had sought to find a means within the vehicle of the novel for projecting a vision of that ideal.

Between 1920 and 1943 Dos Passos wrote nine novels, eight of which have some social or literary significance because of elements within them which are unconventional, if not completely revolutionary. Only his Streets of Night (1923) was a completely orthodox work. This was a species of the "poet against the world" type of fiction which Malcolm Cowley so derisively analyzed and termed as typical of the work of Dos Passos' generation of Harvard aesthetes.[1]

Among the more direct influences upon Dos Passos' career as a novelist was the first World War and the writers of the

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1 Malcolm Cowley. Literary Opinion in America. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1937, p. 497.

late nineteenth century who had taken war as their subject matter. For instance, Dos Passos' first major novel, Three Soldiers (1921), has been compared to Stephen Crane's The Red Badge of Courage because of the two writers' similarity in the emphasis placed upon the deterministic manner in which war reduces men to the stature of slaves and automatons.

The Crane influence is also exhibited in Dos Passos' later work, Manhattan Transfer (1925), in which such bits of impressionism as the following are somewhat extraordinary:

> The people opposite stared straight ahead of them, young men and young women, middleaged people, green faces in the dingy light, under the sourcolored advertisements. FOUR OUT OF EVERY FIVE . . . A trainload of jiggling corpses, nodding and swaying as the express roared shrilly towards Ninetysixth Street. At Ninetysixth she had to change for the local.[1]

By way of comparison one could look into Crane's The Red Badge of Courage and see a similar impressionism although the locale of the scene would be vastly different. The following passage from Crane is quoted because of the similarity it reveals between Crane and Dos Passos in the use of violent images. Dos Passos considered the subway scene to resemble"a trainload of jiggling corpses"; Crane likens a column of infantry to "the sinuous movement of a serpent":

> Presently the calm head of a forward-going column of infantry appeared in the road. It came

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1 Dos Passos. Manhattan Transfer. New York: Somerset Books, Inc., (n.d.), p. 293.

> swiftly on. Avoiding the obstructions gave it the sinuous movement of a serpent. The men at the head butted mules with their musket stocks. They prodded teamsters indifferent to all howls. The men forced their way through parts of the dense mass by strength. The blunt head of the column pushed. The raving teamsters swore many strange oaths.[1]

The similarity between Three Soldiers and The Red Badge of Courage lies not so much in stylistic technique as it does in content. Manhattan Transfer is really closer to the Crane volume in its use of impressionistic imagery. A detailed discussion of Dos Passos' war novel will be dealt with in the next chapter. Incidentally, perhaps both Crane and Dos Passos have reflected similar ideas in the above selections: the indifference of people toward their fellow men while they are members of anonymous crowds.

Dos Passos seems even closer to Crane in technique when he describes the bodily feelings of a character. The scene and the character's reaction to it are shown to advantage with a fair economy of words in the following excerpt:

> He lay on his back on top of the sheet. There came on the air through the window a sourness of garbage, a smell of burnt gasoline and traffic and dusty pavements, a huddled stuffiness of pigeonhole rooms where men and women's bodies writhed alone tortured by the night and the young summer. He lay with seared eyeballs staring at the ceiling, his body glowed in a brittle shivering agony like red-hot metal.[2]

There is a similar handling of a man's physical surroundings

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1 Stephen Crane. The Red Badge of Courage. New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, Inc., (1940 edition), p. 125.
2 Manhattan Transfer, p. 194.

and his bodily responses to them in the Crane material. Crane, however, seldom painted a scene and then dealt with his protagonist's personal feelings all in the same paragraph:

> He got the one glance at the foe-swarming field in front of him, and instantly ceased to debate the question of his piece being loaded. Before he was ready to begin--before he had announced to himself that he was about to fight--he threw the obedient, well-balanced rifle into position and fired a first wild shot. Directly he was working at his weapon like an automatic affair. . . .
>
> Presently he began to feel the effects of the war atmosphere--a blistering sweat, a sensation that his eyeballs were about to crack like hot stones. A burning roar filled his ears.[1]

From impressionism it is a fairly short step into the realm of the stream-of-consciousness. Besides such examples of Crane's influence as were shown in the above paragraphs, there is perhaps also present in Dos Passos' work a stylistic tendency allied to that method of Crane, and even more closely akin to the method of James Joyce. One may see in Manhattan Transfer a Joycean influence in Dos Passos' use of elliptical narrative, sudden changes from objective action to subjective comment, changes from descriptions of events to the thoughts of the character as he contemplates the events, changes from third person to first person narration as the character dramatizes his own experiences. The character's thoughts are not presented formally and consecutively, but by flashes and

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1 The Red Badge of Courage, p. 65.

allusions, as in actual thinking, and with free association of ideas, which do not follow a steady and logical course.[1]

Especially does Dos Passos reflect the Joycean technique in scenes from Manhattan Transfer in which one or more of the characters is under the influence of alcohol:

> It was blowing cold in his face and he was sitting on the front of a ferryboat when he came to. His teeth were chattering, he was shivering . . . I'm having DT's. Who am I? Where am I? City of New York, State of New York. . . . Stanwood Emery age twentytwo occupation student. . . . Pearline Anderson twentyone occupation actress. To hell with her. Gosh I've got fortynine dollars and eight cents and where the hell have I been? And nobody rolled me. Why I havent got the DT's at all. I feel fine, only a little delicate. All I need's a little drink, don't you? Hello, I thought there was somebody here. I guess I'd better shut up."
>
> Fortynine dollars ahanging on the wall
> Fortynine dollars ahanging on the wall
>
> Across the zinc water the tall walls, the birchlike cluster of downtown buildings shimmered up the rosy morning like a sound of horns through a chocolate-brown haze.[2]

"Fantasy, or day-dream, is a recurring feature of Manhattan Transfer as it is of Ulysses. The [Dos Passos'] characters are forever taking flight from the pedestrian actuality into some ideal performance. In each case the vision has the vividness of an hallucination; the imaginary is as real as the actual."[3] A typical day-dreamer is Gus McNiel, Dos Passos' idea of an Irish-American milkman. Gus

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1 Joseph Warren Beach. The Twentieth Century Novel. New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1932, p. 443.
2 Manhattan Transfer, p. 251.
3 Beach, The Twentieth Century Novel, p. 524.

is perhaps a far cry from the Joycean Leopold Bloom of Ulysses, but the similarity in the style of the reveries is remarkable:

> Eleventh Avenue is full of icy dust, of grinding wheels and scraping hoofs on the cobbletones. Down the railroad tracks comes the clang of a locomotive bell and the clatter of shunting freight-cars. Gus is in bed with his wife talking gently to her: Look here Nellie, you wouldn't mind movin West would yez? I've filed application for free farmin land in the state o North Dakota, black soil land where we can make a pile of money in wheat; some fellers get rich in foive good crops. . . . Healthier for the kids anyway. . . . "Hello Moike!" There's poor old Moike still on his beat. Cold work bein a cop. Better be a wheatfarmer an have a big farmhouse an barns an pigs and horses an cows an chickens. . . . Pretty curlyheaded Nellie feedin the chickens at the kitchen door.
>
> "Hay dere for crissake. . . ." a man is yelling at Gus from the curb. "Look out for de cars!"
>
> A yelling mouth gaping under a visored cap, a green flag waving. "Godamighty I'm on the tracks." He yanks the horse's head around. A crash rips the wagon behind him. Cars, the gelding, a green flag, red houses whirl and crumble into blackness.[1]

Another European novelist who seems to have had an influence upon Dos Passos' form of narrative is the German writer, Jakob Wassermann. This Continental novelist's The Gooseman and The World's Illusion are said to be akin to Manhattan Transfer in "the systematic alternation of groups of characters for a purely philosophical and esthetic effect, without regard for plot."[2]

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1 Manhattan Transfer, pp. 47-48.
2 Beach, The Twentieth Century Novel, p. 438.

These two novels of Wassermann's are also similar in nature to Manhattan Transfer in that there are no two sections in them in sequence which deal with the same person. There the resemblance perhaps ends, for Dos Passos created a much greater number of spotlighted characters than did Wassermann, who took his types from the two extremes of wealth and poverty. Dos Passos drew his people from all over, but he borrowed the greatest number from the middle reaches of society where the great masses of Americans live.[1]

Wassermann established one person as the central character and introduced the others in connection with the chief figure and his story. In Manhattan Transfer Dos Passos introduced all of his people independently. The reader is likely to feel that Ellen Thatcher and Jimmy Herf are the leading characters of the novel, but only because Dos Passos gives longer and more frequent views of these two people. The reader sees them and the other characters only at moments that have some particular importance or significance in their lives.

Dos Passos in Manhattan Transfer does not use the Wassermann technique of giving a character's history with completeness. Dos Passos' characters are so numerous, so diversified, and so completely unrelated in any plot, that

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1 Ibid., p. 439.

the Manhattan Transfer people give only "the impression of a section cut straight across the social organism of New York City."[1]

Dos Passos' practice of introducing into a novel a good many characters who have nothing at all to do with the rest of the people in the book is probably closer to Virginia Woolf's technique in Mrs. Dalloway than to any device of Wassermann's. It is a coincidence that both Mrs. Dalloway and Manhattan Transfer were published in 1925. However, in view of the fact that Mrs. Woolf was older than Dos Passos and had been an established literary figure before 1925, it is likely that Dos Passos had heard of the more experienced novelist's work in the direction of "slice-of-life" fiction and had been perhaps partially inspired to try his own hand in that kind of writing.

The French cubists, the school of painters about which Dos Passos must have known while he was in the Gertrude Stein circle after the Armistice, may have had a share in influencing the budding novelist. These post-impressionists chose to paint not one landscape literally, but to pick and choose among the visual objects before them, to present these objects in fragments, to arrange them in aesthetic patterns, to use them as freely as composers in music employ the themes which

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1 Ibid., p. 440.

they put together. "The Camera Eye" sections in Dos Passos' U.S.A. trilogy may reflect this use of cubist impressionism. Ideas, scenes, and even words and sentences are seen only in fragments, but there is an almost metrical arrangement within the apparently patternless collection of "The Camera Eye" chapters.

There may be this cubist influence in Manhattan Transfer too. As the reader turns from one section of the novel to another, he always passes completely from one group of persons and one social milieu to a different one; as in the work of the cubist painters, the spectator's eye jumps from one block of color to another of contrasting hue.

The modern motion picture in some respects is an entity quite remote from cubist painting, but the movie, too, had a part in shaping Dos Passos' various techniques. The motion picture is able to create lightning shifts of scene, flashbacks, bizarre juxtapositions, the illusion of retarded or accelerated motion, and other innovations bordering on the fantastic. James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, and Ernest Hemingway, as well as Dos Passos, have employed the motion picture effect insofar as it is useful in portraying the thought processes of a character. All these writers seem to have put forth the the argument that the sentence established according to the rules of rhetoric is not a unit of actual thinking and never

has been.[1]

In Manhattan Transfer Dos Passos gives a fragmentary interpretation of a man's thought processes in the Gus McNiel dream sequence which has been mentioned earlier in this chapter. In this same novel he allows what may be his own thought processes to be exhibited upon the printed page. These representations of "units of actual thinking" on the author's part are seen chiefly in the prose poems which Dos Passos affixes to the beginnings of each chapter in the novel. However, the content of these prose poems is more reminiscent of Carl Sandburg than of James Joyce or Gertrude Stein. Dos Passos reveals the Sandburgian influence in the way in which he bestows liberal amounts of literary eloquence upon the material aspects of American urban and industrial life:[2]

> Seeping in red twilight out of the Gulf Stream fog, throbbing brassthroat that howls through the stiff-fingered streets, prying open glazed eyes of sky-scrapers, splashing red lead on the girdered thighs of the five bridges, teasing caterwauling tugboats into heat under the toppling smoketrees of the harbor. Spring puckering our mouths . . .[3]

It seems a little ironically incongruous that spring should come so blatantly to the City of New York. Dos Passos' version of Manhattan appears almost hostile to the coming of the new season; the city appears hostile too to the people

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1 Vernon Loggins. I Hear America. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1937, p. 12.
2 Beach. The Twentieth Century Novel, p. 502.
3 Manhattan Transfer, p. 371.

who inhabit it. Sandburg saw Chicago as a hurrying, bustling, brawling city, but he saw it too as a sort of human phenomenon. Dos Passos, like a charter member of the lost generation, sees a city as a very inhuman thing, indifferent to the plight of its people.

Whitman portrayed a city in his work also; he painted the New York City of the nineteenth century in his poetry. But neither he nor Sandburg sought to portray a composite, many-faceted city like the one shown in Manhattan Transfer. Neither poet sought to portray the spirit of an entire nation as Dos Passos did in the trilogy, U.S.A.

Honoré de Balzac was one of the few writers of the past who had ever before attempted a project comparable to Dos Passos' trilogy. Balzac's Comédie Humaine was an effort to re-create in fiction the life of the French provincial bourgeois citizen, the Parisian sophisticate, the political leader, the soldier, the farm rustic, and the rest of the human rungs on society's ladder. Balzac and Dos Passos have a common meeting ground chiefly in their treatment of the tastes and habits of city people, or at least the manners and customs of the many people from everywhere who are living in an urban environment.

Dos Passos' originality, in spite of the numerous literary figures by whom he was influenced, lies in his development of a genre which Granville Hicks proposes to call the "complex

novel."[1] Such a work deals with a great many individuals whose stories are only loosely connected or not at all related. George Eliot's Middlemarch was one of the first English novels to employ a study of several interwoven lives. William Dean Howells' A Hazard of New Fortunes and Frank Norris' The Octopus represent two of the earliest American experiments in this genre. Dos Passos' U.S.A. was an effort toward the portrayal of a number of characters living on a variety of social and economic levels. The people in the U.S.A. trilogy appear to have nothing in common with one another other than the incomprehensible forces of the universe which work upon them similarly. The characters in Middlemarch and in The Octopus have a unity of environment. The fifty or sixty major and minor characters in Middlemarch share the common experience of living in an industrial city in the English Midlands. The numerous individuals in The Octopus are related by their common interests in wheat ranching in California's San Joaquin Valley. The dramatic issue in Middlemarch resides in the dozen or so moral conflicts which involve the various sets of characters. The dramatic issue in The Octopus concerns the struggle between the wheat ranchers and the all-powerful railroads. There is certainly a unity of experience on the part of all of those characters who represent the ranchers' side in the struggle. They suffer similar degrees of misfortune. Behrman, the railroad's chief representative, is also a victim of the indifferent

1 Granville Hicks. The Great Tradition. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935, P. 316.

and universally powerful forces which control the growth of wheat and influence the development of such material things as railroads.

These forces which man is allegedly powerless to control represent one of the features of naturalism. A forerunner of both Norris and Dos Passos in this school of literature was the French novelist, Emile Zola. Zola believed that the race, the environment, the moment, the action of the dominant inherited instinct in an individual should all be combined for study under the microscope of the writer who was striving for photographic realism. He felt that nearly all of the functions of human beings are due to the simple continuity of reflex actions. He paid little attention to the possibility that there might be such a thing as "free-will." He examined minutely the circumstances which cause a person to react in a certain way. His protagonist in Nana takes to prostitution rather ambitiously and makes a successful career of it for a time. Nana acts as she does because of her automatic, uncontrollable responses to a specific passion, a particular environment, and certain other circumstances. One of Dos Passos' major characters in The Big Money, Margo Dowling, reacts to a set of circumstances similar to those faced by Nana. Her material triumphs are of the same kind as Nana's although Margo's seem to be of a more permanent nature.

Another similarity between Dos Passos and Zola is obvious in the tendency of both of them toward the portrayal of collec-

tive life. They both have a feeling for the mass, the crowd, and the diversified cross-section of mankind. Zola began a series of novels in the 1870's with the general plan of depicting all of French society in the period of the Second Empire. He was going to create a panoramic view of the life of that era through the stories of the personal dramas of many diverse individuals. With somewhat the same end in view, Dos Passos created his panoramic view of life in twentieth century America through a recital of the stories of many similarly diverse individuals in the Zola-esque manner.

Turning attention back to Frank Norris at this point, it is noted that this naturalistic American novelist may have had some influence upon Dos Passos in an aspect of fiction related to the Zola technique, but slightly different from it. Norris, like Dos Passos, alternated between several sets of characters in the chapters of The Octopus. Several chapters, or sections of chapters, are devoted to the experiences of Magnus Derrick, the ranchers' leader, and his wife and son. The other individuals are treated similarly. All of them are related to the main thread of the story in the Norris novel. It is in this respect that Norris differs widely from Dos Passos, for the younger novelist included in U.S.A. and Manhattan Transfer many characters who were not related in any way to any thread of the story nor to each other.

Charles Dickens, too, allowed his narrative to leap from one set of characters to another. Like Norris, but unlike Dos

Passos, Dickens' people were nearly always related in some way to a central plot. Critics have not made claims as to the superiority of one theory of character relationships over another, but they have gone so far as to say that Dickens painted a better picture of nineteen century London and Great Britain than Dos Passos has been able to produce with his twentieth century New York City and the United States.

Such an assertion may be based on the idea that the portraits of characters in a novel give a better picture of the life of a particular period than can be accomplished by any amount of expository narrative. Dickens is certainly recognized as a great handler of characterization and caricature. Dos Passos will probably never be so regarded. Dickens' creations like Mr. Micawber, Oliver Twist, the unfortunate Smike, the Pecksniff family, and dozens of others, will probably endure for generations to come.

Dickens was successful in painting on a large canvas, too. In Martin Chuzzlewit a great deal of England is seen at first-hand as well as some bitterly satiric scenes in the United States of the 1840's. There is a possibility that in this vein Dos Passos has excelled his predecessor. In U.S.A. the reader views numerous scenes over a nation three thousand miles wide and over a thousand miles in breadth. Dos Passos shows the reader the very rich, the very poor, most of the phases of middle class existence, the sailors, the soldiers, the hives of industry, and the institutions of society.

Dickens gave to his readers the sound, smell, color, ugliness, and beauty of London and its people. Dos Passos has done the same thing in regard to New York and its citizens. One of the differences between Dickens and Dos Passos lies in their respective ways of treating their characters, especially in the manner in which people come into contact with one another. Dickensian characters sometimes meet through abnormal circumstances or coincidences. The Dos Passos specimens "either do not impinge upon one another's careers or do so very naturally."[1]

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1 Sinclair Lewis. "Review of Manhattan Transfer." In Essays of the Past and Present, Warner Taylor, editor. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1927, p. 432.

Chapter II

THE BIRTH OF DOS PASSOS' EARLIEST TECHNIQUES

In spite of the large number of differences between Dickens and Dos Passos, the two are alike in the respect that they both had axes to grind as they wrote their novels. They both used their techniques of character handling as their principal tools. Dickens painted some evil and some ridiculous characters to personify the evils present in the English probate courts, the public nursing profession, the rotten schools for boys, and the other institutional vices of nineteenth century England. Dickens also created characters who played the parts of victims of the evil-doers. Likewise, Dos Passos put his characters to work to represent the villains and the victims of society's institutions.

> "God! if there were somewhere nowadays where you could flee from all this stupidity, from all this cant of governments, and this hideous reiteration of hatred, this strangling hatred . . ."[1]

This utterance from Martin Howe, the autobiographical hero of One Man's Initiation (1920), is oft repeated by critics who are discussing Dos Passos' political ideologies. However, Martin Howe represents something other than the voice of a sensitive young artist-ambulance driver: Martin Howe is a sort of thread-character who is used to tie all of the novel's isolated episodes together.

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1 First Encounter. (A re-issue of One Man's Initiation) New York: Philosophical Library, 1945, p. 54.

Even though One Man's Initiation--1917 was the first of Dos Passos' novels, it showed the beginning of the author's trend toward the motion picture technique in fiction. In this work unrelated scenes appear in rapid succession. The heart of a scene is flung before the reader with no explanation and with no transitional material employed to mark the changes in time or locale from the preceding event. Transitional exposition is simply not present. In fact, there is hardly anything in the novel other than a stripped-to-essentials series of scenic impressions. The characters are restrained from telling the reader how they feel.

> Martin remembers the beating legs of a mule rolling on its back on the side of the road and, steaming in the fresh morning air, the purple and yellow and red of its ripped belly.[1]

The isolated quotation which was recorded on the previous page is one of the few examples of any character's effort to tell the world what feelings he is harboring within himself.

> Dos Passos may feel that there is something indecent in showing elaborate emotional responses and prefer to let the reader fill out for himself the bare narrative.[2]

Orient Express (1922), a non-fictional collection of travel tales, is much more illustrative of Dos Passos' trend toward fully-developed subjective impressionism than One Man's

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1 Ibid., p. 93.
2 Robert H. Footman. "John Dos Passos," Sewanee Review, XLVII (1939), p. 366.

Initiation. In the travel book the reader is able to experience the sound, color, movement, and especially, the smell, of Constantinople and other Near East localities. In Orient Express there can be detected the bits of impressionism which are to be featured three years afterward in Manhattan Transfer.

> A fragile savor comes from the tiny rounded leaves of the basil in a pot on the edge of the cafe table. Behind on a little platform fenced with red baize, musicians keep up a reiterant humming and twanging out of which a theme in minor climbs and skids in an endless arabesque. There is a kind of lute, a zither, a violin and a woman who sings. In the midst is a stool with coffeecups and a bottle of mastic. The zither is played by a grizzled man with a bottlenose and spectacles who occasionally throws his head back and opens his mouth wide and lets out happily a great Gregorian yodel which the other voices follow and lead back with difficulty into the web of sound. At the tables packed under the locusttree where they will get shade in the afternoon sit people with narghiles or cigarettes or German pipes or American cigars drinking mastic and douzico and grilled meat from the skewers of chiche kebab, and a discordance of many hostile languages and a shuffle of feet from the street under the terrace.[1]

In Orient Express there are even hints of "The Camera Eye" which is to be formally introduced in the first volume of U.S.A. in 1930. In the following excerpt from the book of travel tales, the author is treating himself as a character who, while undergoing an arduous journey in Asia Minor, recalls scenes from his past life in the United States:

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1 Orient Express. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1922, p. 18.

> At last a wheezy black locomotive arrived, towing three grey cars with sunshutters, giving out from every crack the smell of steam and machine oil that brought all terminals back to my mind, the old Seventh Street Depot in Washington and the Grand Central and the South Station and the Gare St. Lazare and the Gare d'Orleans and the Gare de Lyon and the Estacion del Meliodia and the Bahnhof in Strasbourg. Oh, the meals eaten in station restaurants and the coffee and drinks at midnight in the little bars across the street! The oyster stew at the Grand Central and langoustes opposite the Gare St. Lazare, the bolted meals at Bobadilla and the chestnuts and churros at the end of the Calle Atocha, the pickled partridges and the snails washed down with manzanilla, all the last meals in all the terminal cities, meals mixed with the smell of steam and the thump hiss, thump-hiss, thumphiss of engines. Candy cigars cigarettes. . . . Have a nice chicken sandwich, individual brick of pure homemade Horton's icecream. . . . Nothing sold after the train leaves. . . . Oh, even the paper sandwiches and the smell of diapers on the New York, New Haven, and Hartford.[1]

The entire passage above may seem to be only an attempt on Dos Passos' part to reproduce something of the effect of Mark Twain's The Innocents Abroad, but it does reflect the beginnings (regardless of the lack of complete originality) of Dos Passos' later stylistic technique.

Three Soldiers (1921) is a more important landmark in Dos Passos' career than either One Man's Initiation or Orient Express. It is neither a conventional "art novel" like Streets of Night (1923), nor is it the definite departure from literary orthodoxy that his later novels represent. In Three Soldiers the reader is introduced to a talented young

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1 Orient Express, p. 101.

American musician, John Andrews, who finds that his sensibilities are being outraged and his aspirations being crushed by society, as embodied in the United States Army in the first World War. Andrews deserts from the army after he finds that he can derive no justice from its inefficient, yet machine-like, domination. He tries to write a great orchestral poem. When the military police come to arrest him, the sheets of music flutter one by one from the table in his room and are scattered by the winds. The reader is made to feel that the destruction of this symphony, choked off and dispersed upon the winds, is the real tragedy of the War.[1]

Perhaps the sad fate of John Andrews does represent only one of the personal tragedies fostered by the War. But if one adds up the similar misfortunes of similar people involved in the conflict, he can see that a really great tragedy is apparent and that this could weigh heavily upon the outlook of an entire generation--the generation to which Dos Passos belongs.

The second soldier, Dan Fuselli, is a San Francisco youth of Italian extraction. He wishes to make good in the army so that his parents and his girl can be proud of him. He resolves to do all his work well, to be courteous, industrious, and abstemious; yet he, too, is crushed by the machine.

The third soldier, Chrisfield, is an Indiana farm boy,

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1 Bernard DeVoto. "John Dos Passos, Anatomist of Our Time," Saturday Review of Literature, XIV (Aug. 8, 1936), 3.

the potential heir of a mysterious homicidal characteristic possessed by his father. Chrisfield is the most stolid man of the three, but he is also the least tractable. He finally kills a superior officer who has abused him and then becomes a deserter.

Bernard DeVoto feels that "the most striking element in Three Soldiers is the author's burning vision of his characters as mere atoms of personality buffeted by the tremendous forces in which they are caught."[1] Dos Passos failed, however, [according to DeVoto] to give a well-rounded picture of army life. He instilled into his novel no humor, no spirit of camaraderie, no appreciation of the sharpened senses of the hundreds and thousands of men who really found themselves for the first time while in the army. Possibly the one scene that revealed any exploration of the rapport which may exist between two people is that sequence in Three Soldiers in which Andrews encounters a Frenchman selling mechanical rabbits on a Paris streetcorner.

> "The gentleman amuses himself in Paris?" asked the rabbit man timidly.
> "Oh, yes; and you?"
> "Quietly," the rabbit man smiled. "Women are very beautiful at this hour of the evening," he said again in his very timid tone.
> "There is nothing more beautiful than this moment of the evening . . . in Paris."
> "Or Parisian women." The eyes of the rabbit

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1 Ibid., p. 3.

> man glittered. "Excuse me, sir," he went on. "I must try and sell some rabbits."
>
> "Au revoir," said Andrews holding out his hand.
>
> The rabbit man shook it with sudden vigor and went off, making a rabbit hop before him along the curbstone. He was hidden by the swiftly moving crowds.[1]

This may not be an example of the camaraderie for which DeVoto is searching, but it does show that Dos Passos is not unaware of the intangible relationships which do exist between man and man.

It seems that one can best illustrate the technical developments present in Three Soldiers by further consideration of several more aspects of DeVoto's criticism:

> "The result [of Three Soldiers] was, certainly, a memorable record of horror and brutality, but it left out many things that exist on the record, things that rounding out the picture, might well have increased its horror. It narrowed the war to its impact on one mind, it was one man's initiation as Mr. Dos Passos put it in another title. It thus lost its representative purpose in a marked individualism."[2]

DeVoto is probably right in his assertion, for Dos Passos apparently did fail in giving three separate and distinct points of view of the war. Andrews, Chrisfield, and Fuselli were from three distinctly different environments and had

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1 Three Soldiers. New York: The Modern Library, p. 335.
2 DeVoto, op. cit., p. 3.

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1 Three Soldiers. New York: The Modern Library. p. 283.
2 DeVoto. op. cit.. p. 8.

been stamped with three distinctly different levels of mental and emotional behavior. But all three of the men react alike the the army life. It is certainly plausible to think that three people with quite opposing personalities would not have identical responses to the same situation; "and it is aesthetically false, since it leads to monotony."[1]

Yet Three Soldiers is not completely barren, aesthetically speaking. It has in it a sort of Wagnerian technique--a leit-motif: the symbols in the novel are named or pointed out so that they cannot be missed. The degradation and degeneration of the three soldiers is indicated throughout its various stages by the titles of the book's main divisions: "Making the Mould," "The Metal Cools," "Machines," "Rust," "The World Outside," "Under the Wheels."

"Making the Mould" features the life of the three men in the army training camps in the United States. "The Metal Cools" shows Fuselli and Chrisfield hardening into automatons because of the environment of regimentation. "Machines" shows the life behind the front in France. Chrisfield is emphasized especially as the man who has become an unthinking mechanism. The scene in which he kicks at the prostrate body of the dead German until he realizes that the German has no face shows how

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1 Footman, op. cit., p. 369.

deeply immersed in the ways of war the American has become. Chrisfield reacts automatically to even a friendly dig in the ribs by a comrade and throws his fist at the man's jaw without provocation.

"Rust" symbolizes Andrews' growing misfortunes and degradations. He is wounded; he sees the Armistice come while officers make whoopee and enlisted men are told to keep quiet; he puzzles over the strangely conflicting ideologies of his superior officers and the Y.M.C.A. men.

"The World Outside" reflects Andrews' brief moment of happiness when he is assigned to the school detachment in Paris to study music. The concluding section entitled "Under the Wheels" shows Andrews' desertion and recapture after he has been railroaded into a detention camp. Fuselli and Chrisfield desert also; all three men reach the end of the story still physically alive, but completely dead in spirit.

Perhaps the real significance of Three Soldiers lies in its fairly objective picture of young manhood's revolt against the hampering, confining, blundering forces of the world. But this theme has been sounded over and over again by writers almost as far back as Aeschylus. The only definite artistic contributions the novel makes are in its stories of the three parallel, but crossing and recrossing, careers. Chrisfield, Fuselli, and Andrews meet each other from time to time, but each man has his own independent experiences and chapter sections set aside for his own story.

The stylistic techniques in Three Soldiers are deserving of comment also. Here, as in One Man's Initiation--1917, there are the rapid changes of scene reminiscent of the early motion pictures.

> The mess-call blew and the men filed out. He could hear their talk outside, and the sound of their mess-kits as they opened them. He lay on his bunk staring up into the dark. A faint blue light still came from outside, giving a curious purple color to Small's redface and long drooping nose at the end of which hung a glistening drop of moisture.
>
> Chrisfield found Andrews washing a shirt in the brook that flowed through the ruins of the village the other side of the road from the buildings where the division was quartered.[1]

Often such a sudden shift in scene features an abrupt change in the character being spotlighted. The following excerpt represents a typical scene and character switch--from the railroad station platform in Paris to the remote bivouac where Chrisfield is resting with his company:

> Walters and five other men straggled along the platform towards him, carrying or dragging their packs.
>
> There was a look of apprehension on Walters' face.
>
> "Well, what do we do now?" he said.
>
> "Do!" cried Andrews, and he burst out laughing.
>
> Prostrate bodies in olive drab hid the patch of tender green grass by the roadside. The company was resting. Chrisfield sat on a stump morosely whittling at a stick with a pocket knife.[2]

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1 Three Soldiers, p. 172.
2 Ibid., p. 292.

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There was a look of apprehension on Walters' face.

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"Do!" cried Andrews, and he burst out laughing.

Prostrate beside in olive drab lay the petah of tender green grass by the roadside. The company was resting. Chatfield sat on a stump morosely whittling at a stick with a pocket knife.[2]

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1 Three Soldiers, p. 172.
2 Ibid., p. 282.

Also indicative of the influence of the motion picture is Dos Passos' use of accelerated and decelerated narrative. These aspects of his work are not as pronounced in Three Soldiers as they are in Manhattan Transfer, but they do seem worth mentioning. For instance, a deceleration of narrative is noticeable when Dos Passos includes a great deal of dialogue. Here is the cinematic slow-motion effect:

> "There's been a devil of a lot of artillery going up the road; French, British, every old kind."
>
> "Tell me they's raisin' hell in the Oregon forest."
>
> They walked slowly across the road. A motorcycle despatch-rider whizzed past them.
>
> "It's them guys has the fun," said Chrisfield.
>
> "I don't believe anybody has much."
>
> "What about the officers?"
>
> "They're too busy feeling important to have a real hell of a time."[1]

The technique of acceleration is more apparent in the portrayal of a character's thoughts than in the presentation of the spoken word. Long sentences made up of numerous clauses with few subject nouns and many verbs create the illusion of rapid motion:

> The straw rustled faintly under him with every sleepy movement Andrews made in his blankets. In a minute the bugle was going to blow and he was going to jump out of his blankets, throw on his clothes and fall into line for roll call in the black mud of the village street. It couldn't be that only a month had gone by since he had got back from hospital. No, he had spent a lifetime

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1 Ibid., p. 173.

> in this village being dragged out of his warm blankets every morning by the bugle, shivering as he stood in line for roll call, shuffling in a line that moved slowly past the cookshack, shuffling along in another line to throw what was left of his food into garbage cans, to wash his mess kit in the greasy water a hundred other men had washed their mess kits in; lining up to drill, to march on along muddy roads, splattered by the endless trains of motor trucks; lining up twice more for mess, and at last being forced by another bugle into his blankets again to sleep heavily while a smell hung in his nostrils of sweating woolen clothing and breathed-out air and dusty blankets.[1]

It is interesting to speculate upon the degree of regimentation which Dos Passos appears to find in civilian life as well as in the life in the armed forces. A study of Manhattan Transfer may reveal certain rigidly regulated aspects of life in the existences of allegedly free and independent urban Americans.

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1 Ibid., p. 274.

Chapter III

MANHATTAN TRANSFER, THE PORTRAIT OF A CITY

It has been pointed out that it was the first World War that helped to determine the bent of Dos Passos' literary talent. Dos Passos was wont to believe that the lies which caused the war were the creation of a society which concocted the lies in times of peace. He wanted to exhibit and expose this society upon a bare stage. His first major exhibition of society in the large came in 1925 with the publication of Manhattan Transfer. In this novel he recorded a rapidly moving procession of moments drawn from the lives of a great number of people. These characters were selected to represent the varied classes which make up twentieth century society, at least the social order which is to be found in New York City.

The characters in Manhattan Transfer are people such as would be included in the stories on a city newspaper's front page. Thus it would appear that Dos Passos is operating upon the assumption that the daily newspaper is the best single index of the American life and mind.[1]

In this novel are characters to represent the upper and middle classes of Gotham society: lawyers, actors, bankers, politicians, labor organizers, wealthy bootleggers, importers, wildcat stock promoters, architects, and engineers. Then there

1 Joseph Warren Beach. American Fiction 1920-1940. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941, p. 35.

are people like Anna Cohen, a sweatshop seamstress; Joe Harland, an ex-financier who becomes a drunken bum; and Bud Korpenning, a runaway farm youth who jumps off the Brooklyn Bridge because of his fear of the police.

Each of these individuals has his moment or moments of spotlight upon the front page. Throughout Manhattan Transfer the steadily rising careers of those who prosper are crossed in a fairly regular pattern by the orbits of those who drift downward into oblivion or disaster.

But Dos Passos' does not direct the reader's interest toward the individual dramas of his characters or toward their individual joys and sorrows. These people are of interest and significance "only insofar as they are the cellular stuff, the protoplasmic basis, of all social structures."[1] It is the pattern itself which interests Dos Passos as a literary collectivist.

Professor Beach believes that Dos Passos is seeking to express the social nexus. However, his effort to contribute something toward the expression of this social nexus is not completely successful. He does show a huge group of people living in the same city and subject to the same natural and civil laws and economic stresses, but he fails to create a feeling of the social nexus binding one person to another.

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1 Joseph Warren Beach. American Fiction 1920-1940. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941, p. 41.

Situations in which affection, gratitude, obligation, and cooperation are present as connecting links between characters are not easily discovered in Manhattan Transfer.

Dos Passos hints at this sort of social relationship only once. Elaine Oglethorpe (nee Ellen Thatcher) cannot buy her expensive clothes unless there are people like Anna Cohen to make them in the sweatshops. It is improbable that Ellen or Anna realize the relationship between them. It is only the disastrous fire in the millinery shop and Anna's being burned almost to death that brings into the novel any consideration of this kind of social pattern. The reader is given only a brief insight into Ellen's feelings for her less fortunate sister:

> Ellen goes out to the street. The fireengines are arriving. Policemen are beating back the crowds. She wants to go away but she cant, she's waiting for something. At last she hears it tinkling down the street. As the fireengines go clanging away, the ambulance drives up. Attendants carry in the folded stretcher. Ellen can hardly breathe. She stands beside the ambulance behind a broad blue policeman. She tries to puzzle out why she is so moved; it is as if some part of her were going to be wrapped in bandages, carried away on a stretcher. Too soon it comes out, between the routine faces, the dark uniforms of the attendants.
>
> * * *
>
> Why should I be so excited? she keeps asking herself. Just somebody's bad luck, the sort of thing that happens every day. The moaning turmoil and the clanging of the fireengines wont seem to fade away inside her.[1]

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1 Manhattan Transfer, p. 399.

Dos Passos must have been making an effort to develop a novelistic technique to serve his social theme. He succeeds in giving a picture of many separate lives being lived simultaneously. He sees no need in following each character into all of the ramifications of his or her private life. He gives only enough of the living tissue in each human specimen so that one can determine the structure of the person and something of the part the individual plays in society as a whole.

One must read at least one-half of Manhattan Transfer before he can visualize Dos Passos' technique in operation. As the rapidly changing events are projected onto the screen of the reader's imagination, he may begin to realize that Dos Passos' people are not so completely unrelated as it might seem from a casual perusal of the first several dozen pages. It is shown to be inevitable that some of the characters will come into contact with one another. It is natural, not coincidental, that Jimmy Herf, the New York newspaperman, will meet Elaine Oglethorpe, the Broadway star. It seems similarly natural when the two of them become involved with George Baldwin, a prominent lawyer, in Congo Jake's speakeasy. Even the scene in which Ellen views the burned body of Anna Cohen being carried out of the dress shop is built up as a plausible circumstance, not as an artificially contrived incident.[1]

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[1] Joseph Warren Beach. American Fiction 1920--1940, p. 48.

This scene, as has been mentioned before, shows something of the mysterious, unexplainable affinity between person and person, but the event of the dress shop fire is only one isolated instance. Dos Passos has made an effort, consciously or unconsciously, to reveal a more superficial kinship of the inhabitants of the metropolis. His constant re-iteration of the ferry-boat, fire engine, and hurrying crowd motif is perhaps a carryover from the Wagnerian technique of the machine symbolism in Three Soldiers. The ferry-boats, fire engines, and hurrying crowds viewed in so many scenes in Manhattan Transfer give a sense of the repetitiousness of city life that nearly every inhabitant shares daily with his fellows. Even though such an atmosphere of repetitiousness, hurrying, monotony, and rubbish on the harbor waters is not a phenomenon to be cherished by many people, it is something in which they live and of which they own a part.

Turning to the characters as individuals rather than as a mass, it is interesting to note that Dos Passos has a fairly original technique in his naturalistic treatment of his people. The term "naturalistic" is used here in the same sense in which one would use it in calling Zola a "naturalistic" novelist. Dos Passos tries to eliminate any tendency of the omniscient author to show through the screen upon which he's projecting his story. He portrays his characters in a series of separate and unrelated moments. The reader sees, as in a laboratory experiment upon the neural reactions of frogs or guinea pigs,

a succession of stimuli administered to a character; then the reader witnesses the character's automatic responses. The events which occur in the intervals in the story during which a specific person is removed from the spotlight and another one is installed in his place does not seem to matter. The typical Dos Passos character has a personality of no startlingly original cast. The character is simply a creature of uniform responses to a given order of stimuli. Probably such a technique of character handling contributes something to the effect of life seen only as sensation; it is a little doubtful, though, just how much such a practice contributes to the construction of great novels. Professor Beach believes that "the human mind has difficulty in thinking of itself in such purely mechanical terms,"[1] [as those terms in which Dos Passos' characters live, move, and have their being] and hence the reader notices the novel's effect of bewilderment and futility which is said to be so characteristic of contemporary literature.

The one positive effect Dos Passos has gained from his presentation of puppet-like rather than flesh-and-blood personalities, is the depiction of mass man, "the mass experience obliterating the individual. The War carried the theme in Three Soldiers, the metropolis in Manhattan Transfer."[2]

It may be a characteristic of the twentieth century mind

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1 Joseph Warren Beach. American Fiction 1920--1940, p. 44.
2 DeVoto, op. cit., p. 3.

to feel that the mass experience obliterates the individual, or, on the other hand, perhaps the sensitive poet has always felt that his individuality was being crushed by mass society. At any rate, there can be little doubt in anyone's mind that Dos Passos was definitely dealing with the twentieth century in Manhattan Transfer and with a particular era of that period.

He makes the dates of the events in the lives of the main characters obvious without ever advising the reader in such an unsubtle manner as: "Ellen Thatcher was born in 1898." He interjects newspaper clippings and headlines and fragments of popular songs into the section adjacent to the narrative of any important event. For instance, Dos Passos begins the first chapter in the third section of Manhattan Transfer with a scene of Fifth Avenue with flags flying, men marching under ticker tape showers, and with "There's a Long, Long Trail A-winding" and other wartime songs interspersed among the images of the city and harbor. Then the reader sees Captain James Merivale seated in a barber chair and recognizes the implication that the first World War is over and that Merivale has come back home to New York from France.

Many events are not dated at all, but dates seem not to be completely necessary to give the general impression of New York City's life. The impression is built up from flashes of dazzling color, dizzy movement, smells, disorder, the snatching at money, the yearning for love, the striving for material comforts, and "the sad despair in a whirl of gaiety." Here is

Dos Passos at his pallette creating scenes of almost complete discontinuity.[1]

> Each chapter is a loose bundle of incidents from the lives of many different persons or groups, anywhere from four to sixteen in number, completely unrelated save in time and their common involvement in the chaos of Manhattan. There is no effort to mark transitions; each slide replaces the preceding one without preparation or apology, but with something like the flicker of the early silent movies. We pass from the midst of one situation to the midst of another. The characters reappear at wide intervals, without connection or reintroduction.[2]

Some of the characters seem acutely aware of the big city whirligig. They think that their ill-fortune is caused by the hyper-developed organization of modern society, which New York City may be said to symbolize. The confused welter of unrelated events could be, therefore, the novelist's way of creating in the reader's consciousness the same confused state of mind to which the characters are subject. Marco, an Italian waiter in a Manhattan restaurant, is an example of a character who is among the most confused and the most bitter:

> "It's the same all over the world, the police beating us up, rich people cheating us out of their starvation wages, and who's fault? . . . Dio cane! Your fault, Emile's fault . . ."
> "Religion, politics, democracy, all that is to keep us asleep . . ."[3]

Because the city is a confused mass of exciting movement, and because the characters are also confused by a complex social order, the author, it may be feared, is a little per-

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1 Joseph Warren Beach. The Twentieth Century Novel, p. 444.
2 Joseph Warren Beach. American Fiction 1920--1940, p. 43.
3 Manhattan Transfer, pp. 37-38.

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1 Joseph Warren Beach. The Twentieth Century Novel, p. 444.
2 Joseph Warren Beach. American Fiction 1920--1940, p. 48.
3 Manhattan Transfer, pp. 27-28.

plexed himself. Yet he does not interject his own personality into Manhattan Transfer's narrative proper so that the reader can fully determine the extent of his personal confusion, if any. Dos Passos remains seemingly objective in his relating of events. The only subjective touches he bestows upon the novel are represented by the prose poems affixed to the beginnings of the principal chapters. These prose poems are not only descriptive items, they are symbolistic devices which perhaps have a wider reference than the actual subject matter within the individual chapters. For example, the poem giving an impressionistic account of a rollercoaster ride may be symbolic of the slow, steady rise of personal fortunes in the metropolis, of the terrifying swoops and dives of the personal careers of others, and of the mingled feelings of disillusionment and exhilaration which one might feel after a life in the city or a ride on a rollercoaster .

The foregoing statements represent pure speculation for the most part, yet it would appear certainly that the use of the prose poem in Manhattan Transfer has more significance than merely giving the reader a quick, impressionistic look at Coney Island:

> They pair off hurriedly. STANDING UP IN CAR STRICTLY FORBIDDEN. The climbing chain grates, grips the cogs; jerkily the car climbs the incline out of the whirring lights, out of the smell of crowds and steamed corn and peanuts, up jerkily grating up through the tall night of September meteors.
>
> Sea, marshsmell, the lights of an Iron Steamboat leaving the dock. Across wide violent indigo a lighthouse blinks. Then the swoop. The sea

> does a flipflop, the lights soar. Her hair in his mouth, his hand in her ribs, thighs grind together. The wind of their falling has snatched their yells, they jerk rattling upwards through the tangled girderstructure. Swoop. Soar. Bubbling lights in a sandwich of darkness and sea. Swoop. KEEP YOUR SEATS FOR THE NEXT RIDE.[1]

It has been stated in the preceding pages of this chapter that one should think of Manhattan Transfer in terms of themes rather than in terms of plot structure or dramatic issue. Dos Passos apparently did not wish to develop his themes by personal intrusion and comment upon the course of the stories. Here lies perhaps another purpose of the prose poems: there may be a gradually growing crescendo illusion in the cumulative effect of all of the chapter titles and the impressionistic passages accompanying them. Here are some of the chapter titles: "Ferryslip," "Metropolis," "Dollars," "Tracks," "Steamroller," "Great Lady on a White Horse," "Longlegged Jack of the Isthmus," "Nine Days' Wonder," "Rejoicing City That Dwelt Carelessly," "Revolving Doors," and the last one is "The Burthen of Nineveh."

The chapter titles and the prose poems make the novel seem somewhat like a literary symphony with a theme which emphasizes a dizzily increasing tempo and violence of sound until the finale comes with a loud clash of cymbals, brass, and tympani. Yet the narrative portion of the book actually

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1 Manhattan Transfer, p. 237.

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1 Manhattan Transfer. p. 227.

ends on a somber note of pianissimo as Jimmy Herf leaves the city forever, his money gone, disillusioned, and aimless:

> "Say will you give me a life?" he asks the redhaired man at the wheel.
> "How fur ye goin?"
> "I dunno. . . . Pretty far."[1]

This is a slowing down, a quiet denouement, a contrast to the violently fast [in every sense of the word] living Dos Passos has concentrated upon in the bulk of the novel. His very style suggests the accelerated pace of twentieth century life in the United States. Here is an added increment to the accelerated style mentioned in connection with Three Soldiers. For instance, when Ellen undergoes an abortion at the hands of an unscrupulous doctor, she suffers immensely; yet when she leaves the physician's office and joins the anonymous crowd, she is caught up in the rhythm and tempo of the street symphony:

> The roar of the streets breaks like surf about a shell of throbbing agony. She watches the tilt of her leather hat, the powder, the rosed cheeks, the crimson lips that are a mask on her face. All the buttons of her gloves are buttoned. She raises her hand. "Taxi!" A fire engine roars past, a hosewagon with sweatyfaced men pulling on rubber coats, a clanging hookandladder. All the feeling in her fades with the dizzy fade of the siren. A wooden Indian, painted, with a hand raised at the streetcorner.
> "Taxi!"
> "Yes ma'am."
> "Drive to the Ritz."[2]

Of further significance in Ellen's rapidity of existence is her ironic concern for the time "wasted" in the actual

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1 Manhattan Transfer, p. 404.
2 Ibid., p. 268.

abortion procedure and her convalescence from it afterwards:

> "It wont take very long will it? If I can pull myself together I have an engagement for tea at five."[1]

Monosyllabic sentences like those in the above selection are considered by Dos Passos as the typical American manner of speaking. Then, too, he gives the reader polysyllabic words in sentences divided into clipped phrases which seem to make the eye hurry madly from capital letter to period regardless of whether or not the subject matter is dynamic or whether or not it is static:

> The smell of presses still in his nose, the chirrup of typewriters still in his ears, Jimmy Herf stood in City Hall Square with his hands in his pockets watching ragged men with caps and earsflaps pulled down over faces and necks the color of raw steak shovel snow.[2]

Closer-knit impressions seem to be gained in Dos Passos' handling of simple narrative. He couples the accelerated tenor of narration with the stream-of-consciousness technique in re-creating the ideas passing through a character's mind. Those things which the individual feels, sees, hears, and smells are brought out in fragmentary though not completely incomprehensible patterns. When Jimmy Herf, nearly drunk, dances with Ellen in Congo Jake's place, the reader is likely to find himself feeling an empathic response to the scene, if he is not too sensitive to the unpleasant imagery:

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1 loc. cit.
2 op. cit., pp. 343-344.

> "Get up on your toes and walk in time to the music. . . Move in straight lines that's the whole trick." Her voice cut the quick coldly like a tiny flexible sharp metalsaw. Elbows joggling, faces set, gollywog eyes, fat men and thin women, thin women and fat men rotated densely about them. He was crumbling plaster with something that rattled achingly in his chest, she was an intricate machine of sawtooth steel whitebright bluebright copperbright in his arms. When they stopped her breast and the side of her body and her thigh came against him. He was suddenly full of blood steaming with sweat like a runaway horse. A breeze through an open door hustled the tobacco-smoke and the clotted pink air of the restaurant.[1]

It seems to be broken color, rather than strictly unselective photographic realism, that Dos Passos emphasizes in Manhattan Transfer. It may be that the average city dweller sees only fragments of scenes as he hurries through his daily routine. It may be that the typical Gothamite sees not even these fragmentary images: his travels through the streets, stores, and subways may be only one continuous blur. To the conscious poet such as Dos Passos seems to be in a sense who lives and moves in the great city at a slower rate of speed than the office clerk or shop worker, certain snatches of shade and form appear. When Dos Passos creates his broken color scenes so that they form a part of a day in the life of one of his characters, he seems much less the consciously laboring poet than when he composes a prose poem from the omnisdent author's point of view to begin a new chapter.

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1 Ibid., p. 228.

For instance, his prose poem which heads the chapter entitled "Fire Engine" is certainly not incongruous nor far-fetched, yet one might succumb to the feeling that Dos Passos was trying too hard to create something quaint and bizarre and sophisticatedly impressionistic:

> Such afternoons the buses are crowded into line like elephants in a circusparade. Morningside Heights to Washington Square, Penn Station to Grant's Tomb. Parlorsnakes and flappers joggle hugging downtown uptown, hug joggling gray square after gray square, until they see the new moon giggling over Weehawken and feel the gusty wind of a dead Sunday blowing dust in their faces, dust of a typsy twilight.[1]

Now in considering a more prosaic group of imagistic sentences, the reader is allowed to see some of Ellen's reactions to the city's constantly shifting stage. The reader is allowed to note the scene changes as well as the character. It certainly seems that Dos Passos makes New York live a little more intimately and concretely in the reader's mind in the following paragraph than in the foregoing selection even though he does not instill the conscious poetry of the abstract scene into this very concrete setting:

> The leaves were shriveled on the saplings along the path. South and east sunnyfaced buildings hemmed in the Park, to the west they were violent with shadow. Everything was itching sweaty dusty constrained by policemen and Sunday clothes. Why hadn't she taken the L? She was looking in the black eyes of a young man in a straw hat who was drawing up a red Stutz roadster to the curb. His eyes twinkled in hers, he

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1 Ibid., p. 202.

> jerked back his head smiling an upsidedown smile, pursing his lips so that they seemed to brush her cheek. He pulled the lever of the brake and opened the door with the other hand. She snapped her eyes away and walked on with her chin up. Two pigeons with metalgreen necks and feet of coral waddled out of her way. An old man was coaxing a squirrel to fish for peanuts in a paper bag.[1]

Two typical street scenes have been quoted. Both seem to contribute to the reader's realization of the texture of city life. One is completely the author's own point of view. The other is the author's point of view tempered by the fictional reactions of a character in the story.

It has been mentioned in this chapter that Dos Passos' scenes were frequently composed of broken color; his sentences, too, are often built up with broken grammar. He departs from the traditional usage of punctuation on many occasions; he employs apparently unrelated sentences welded together so as to more nearly affect what he considers the reproduction of human thought processes to be. Sinclair Lewis, and numerous others, both facetious and serious, have jeered at the Dos Passos device of running words together: "Greasyfaced," "hookandladder," "sirenshriek," and "chinacloset" are among some of the amalgamations. This sort of thing can be temporarily baffling to the eye and irritating to the mind, but it does seem to be a definite contribution to an effect other than

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1 Ibid., p. 136.

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1 Ibid., p. 126.

merely the desire to "be different." The running together of such commonplace word groupings as "livingroom," "wageslaves," and "hotwaterbottle" seems commensurate with the rapidity with which city dwellers speak.

In regard to Dos Passos' use of unrelated sentences and phrases which are frequently juxtaposed without much regard for punctuation or other grammatical rules, it might be said that stream-of-consciousness writing cannot exist in the conventional forms of composition. A man or woman seldom thinks in complete sentences or in carefully balanced and constructed phrases and clauses. A person may not think in the same terms in which Jimmy Herf is alleged to be cogitating in Manhattan Transfer, but it does not seem too unlikely that a train of thought be expressed in a series of unrelated sentences, and in word groupings which are not really sentences at all:

> Express service meets the demands of spring. O God to meet the demands of spring. No tins, no sir, but there's rich quality in every mellow pipeful. . . . SOCONY. One taste tells more than a million words. The yellow pencil with the red band. Than a million words, than a million words. "All right hand over that million. . . . Keep him covered Ben." The Yonkers gang left him for dead on a bench in the park. They stuck him up, but all they got was a million words. . . . "But Jimps, I'm so tired of booktalk and the proletariat, cant you understand? Chockful of golden richness, spring.[1]

It is obvious that no effort has been made by the author to mark the transitions from the spoken word to the headlines or

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1 Ibid., p. 352.

from the words being turned over in the mind to the words on the advertising signs. The lack of transitional guides is noticeable too in the changes from one scene to another and from one character's life story to that of another. It has been previously indicated in this chapter that this lack of transitional material is a development of the motion picture technique which was employed, at least in part, in Three Soldiers.

In Manhattan Transfer there are scores of characters whose stories are concentrated upon by Dos Passos for a few pages and then dropped. In Three Soldiers, the stories of only a trio of characters were concentrated upon; when one was temporarily dropped from the reader's view, the story of either of the other two soldiers was easy to pick up and continue. In Manhattan Transfer the first chapter (eight pages in all) introduces: (1) the birth of Ellen Thatcher in a single paragraph; (2) Bud Korpenning's arrival in New York; (3) Ellen's father's experiences on her natal day; (4) an unnamed Jewish father who shaves off his beard for the first time. In the second chapter (thirty-six pages in length) the reader sees: (1) a flashback of Ed Thatcher's musings upon the fact of his daughter Ellen's birth; (2) a young husband known only as Mr. Perry being high-pressured into buying a Utopian suburban lot; (3) Bud Korpenning getting a haircut; (4) Ed Thatcher watching his growing daughter dance and play in his living room; (5) an unidentified youth having impassioned words with a girl named Emily while on

his way to work; (6) Congo Jake, a French sailor, approaching New York on a cargo ship; (7) Ellen Thatcher's mother failing in health; (8) Bud Korpenning looking in vain for a steady job; (9) Some gamins led by a boy named Slats having a crap game broken up by the appearance of some larger hoodlums; (10) Emile, a Frenchman, and Marco, an Italian, working in an exclusive Manhattan restaurant; (11) Young Mr. and Mrs. William C. Olafson renting an apartment on Riverside Drive; (12) Bud Korpenning getting a dishwashing job, but quitting after two hours work after thinking he sees a detective watching him; (13) Ellen Thatcher having a terrifying evening at home when her parents go out and leave her alone with her vivid imagination; (14) Gus McNiel, a milkman, having a couple of beers on his morning route, and getting hurt when his wagon collides with some shunted freight cars.

Some of the characters, like Slats, young Perry, and Mr. and Mrs. Olafson, the reader never sees again. The others recur in scenes by themselves from time to time or in conjunction with other characters whose paths they cross. But never does a sentence of transition rear its head to tell the reader what has been happening to the character since he was seen last. Perhaps this is a logical practice on the author's part: if all of these people were the reader's personal friends in the City of New York, it would certainly be impossible to know their experiences during every moment of their lives.

Regardless of the logic or the fallaciousness behind Dos Passos' techniques employed in Manhattan Transfer, it seems plausible that he has given us a look at a cross-section of a city, or at least what he considers a cross-section to be. The city is there; its portrait is built up throughout the pages of the novel. The reader may hate the picture, or he may be enthralled by it; it is doubtful that he will remain indifferent to it.

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Chapter IV

U.S.A., THE PORTRAIT OF A NATION

Manhattan Transfer was a novel featuring many literary experiments; U.S.A., with its three novels, The 42nd Parallel (1930), Nineteen Nineteen (1932), The Big Money (1936), cast in the same mold, was the climax of all Dos Passos' experimentation. Dos Passos may have felt that he was not painting a complete picture of his times in confining his examination of society to the City of New York, even though this municipality has been so often termed the metropolis of the twentieth century world. Joseph Warren Beach has speculated that Dos Passos wanted to create a portrait of America which would "bring in the big towns of the hinterland, the prairie farms and lumber camps, the seven seas and the Central America which are the arena of our commerce and imperialism, and the wartime France and Italy that were the playground and the graveyard of our crusading youth."[1]

Beach goes on to say that Dos Passos "must have felt, again, that in Manhattan Transfer he had given an inadequate selection of our national types; that he needed to lay more emphasis, both on the industrialist, the promoter, and the

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1 Beach. American Fiction 1920--1940, p. 52.

on the obscure men who do the chores. Perhaps he felt that, effective as it was in his way, and even a trifle theatrical, his dot-and-dash system of striking the high points of many lives left something to be desired in the way of sobriety and thoroughness; and he now chose to feature fewer characters and give a fuller and more consecutive account of their lives."[1]

Percy H. Boynton offers the comment that in U.S.A. Dos Passos undertook a project more systematic than that of any other author to represent in fiction "a money-mad democracy in which the predatory instinct, now dominant, may be first controlled and then perhaps transformed into something less primitive, more benevolent."[2]

Granville Hicks, a major left-wing literary figure of the 1930's, greeted U.S.A. with the declaration that the trilogy was to be known as something more than a "collective" novel, it was really a "complex" novel.

> The complex novel is, indeed, a natural expression of that sense of the absence of unity that Henry Adams regarded as characteristic of the modern era. Today [1935] on the other hand, the sensitive novelist is likely to despair of achieving representativeness unless he portrays a variety of characters living on a variety of levels.[3]

In U.S.A. Dos Passos seems to have attempted a synthesis of the pattern of industrial democracy which the United States

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1 loc. cit.
2 Percy H. Boynton. America in Contemporary Fiction. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1940, p. 185.
3 Hicks, op. cit., p. 316.

has followed from 1900 up to the 1930's. The characters seem to be approximate contemporaries of the author himself. They seem to have had birthdates between 1885 and 1900 and to have reached adulthood in time to have taken part in some phase of the first World War. They are types drawn from a great variety of social and economic levels and from diverse geographical areas.

Mac [Fenian McCreary], the first character introduced in the first novel in the trilogy, is born in Connecticut; he works as a bookseller's assistant in Michigan, a lumberjack in the Pacific Northwest, a labor organizer and labor press printer in a Nevada mining town, a job printer in Los Angeles, and ends up as a bookshop proprietor in Mexico City. He hovers between abject pauperism and lower middle class poverty in his career with the labor movements.

Janey Williams is born in Maryland; she works as a clerk in Washington, D.C., goes to New York City where she becomes a waspish, successful private secretary to J. Ward Moorehouse. She represents a person who has climbed from very humble beginnings to a position of secure, middle-class respectability.

J. Ward Moorehouse is born in Wilmington, Delaware; he finds jobs in real estate work, journalism, corporation finance, and stock promoting. He sets himself up as a public relations counsellor. He climbs from middle-class origins to a position of some influence and affluence through his

successful marriages and his political and social machinations.

Eleanor Stoddard climbs from middle class obscurity in a small Indiana city into a modicum of fame as an interior decorator in Chicago and New York. She ostensibly becomes a Red Cross worker in Paris during the first World War and a sort of quasi-mistress to Moorehouse.

Charley Anderson appears in one chapter of The 42nd Parallel as a mechanically-gifted youth from the rural Dakotas. In the third volume of the trilogy, The Big Money, he re-appears, this time as an ex-fighter pilot. He meets with some success as a budding aircraft manufacturer, but liquor, women, and the intricacies of high finance bring about disaster for him.

In Nineteen Nineteen the reader meets Janey Williams' brother Joe, a Navy deserter, a poor youth who makes good for a time in the maritime service, but who is cursed by his own overpowering desires for liquor, women, and the easy way out.

Richard Ellsworth Savage represents the sensitive college graduate and part-time aesthete. He is of the upper middle class economically and intellectually. After serving in the War, he becomes one of Moorehouse's assistants. In the last volume of U.S.A. he becomes a drunken thrill-seeker.

Eveline Hutchins is born of a wealthy Chicago family. She joins Eleanor Stoddard in a career of designing and decorating. She follows the crowd to France in 1917. Afterwards she drifts from a pointless marriage to a dilettantish life

of party giving for the great and the near-great.

Daughter [Anne Elizabeth Trent] is born of a prosperous Texas family. She goes to Vassar, searches for thrills and love as a worker in a Methodist relief mission in wartime Italy, and is killed along with her unborn child in an airplane ride with a drunken French pilot.

Ben Compton is a bespectacled Jewish radical from Brooklyn who sticks by his guns in his fight for the betterment of the workingmen's lot. He is sent to a federal prison for ten years when he refuses to serve in the armed forces during the first World War.

Mary French in The Big Money is the daughter of a hard-working, hard-drinking physician in a Colorado mining town. She attends a women's college in the East, becomes a social worker in Chicago, a reporter in Pittsburgh, and finally a sincere and untiring publicist and clerical slave for the radical labor movement.

Margo Dowling goes from her childhood home on the Long Island tidal flats to the third rate vaudeville stage. She marries a homosexual Cuban, becomes a mistress of Charley Anderson, goes on to be a Hollywood star, and is finally the legal wife of Sam Margolies, a lecherous and ambitious motion picture director.

Interwoven among the lives of these twelve major characters are such figures as G. H. Barrow, a platitudinous, ineffectual labor leader; Senator Planet, a perverted old lawyer

with an eye for liquor, logrolling, and the making of the fast dollar; Don Stevens, a Communistic labor organizer who labors more for the greater glory of the Lenin-Stalin ideologies than for the helping of the American worker; Joe Askew, Charley Anderson's honest, industrious partner in the aircraft manufacturing venture; Paul Johnson, sober, simple, ex-soldier to whom Eveline Hutchins is married; E. R. Bingham, a fake clergyman, a salesman of salacious literature who becomes a wealthy manufacturer of patent medicines.

But it is in the dozen major figures whose careers have been outlined in brief in past paragraphs that Dos Passos' experimentation is the most remarkable. He employs the technique of the clinical sociologist in his building of a complete case history of each of the main characters. Eveline Hutchins' life is followed from the time of her birth through all of her significant experiences. The reader is made intimately acquainted with her illicit love affairs with Moorehouse, Anderson, Savage, and Stevens. Her efforts to escape from boredom and reality culminate in suicide. The lives of the eleven other featured players are followed in similar detail.

Mac appears only in The 42nd Parallel. Janey Williams appears in a chapter or chapters of her own only in The 42nd Parallel, but she is a figure in the background in the other two novels as well. J. Ward Moorehouse is similarly featured only in The 42nd Parallel, although he looms large in the other novels, as does Eleanor Stoddard. Joe Williams and Daughter

appear only in Nineteen Nineteen. Dick Savage is featured in both Nineteen Nineteen and The Big Money. There is one chapter of The 42nd Parallel devoted to Charley Anderson, and the bulk of The Big Money is concerned with his life. Eveline Hutchins appears in all three of the novels, although she has a stellar role in only Nineteen Nineteen. Ben Compton is seen as a major figure only in Nineteen Nineteen, but he re-appears in The Big Money after his prison sentence is over. Margo Dowling and Mary French are featured only in The Big Money, and, together with Charley Anderson, they share the limelight in the third volume of the trilogy.

With so many people being served up to the reader amid a mass of sociological detail, it seems impossible to pick out heroes and heroines in the traditional sense of the terms. Matthew Josephson ventures to say that the hero "is not a single person, but a great crowd, and more specifically, a group of types out of the crowd."[1]

Malcolm Cowley is of the opinion that "the real hero . . . is society itself, American society as embodied in forty or fifty representative characters who drift along with it, struggle to change its course or merely to find a secure footing. . ."[2] Cowley enlarges upon his theory to some extent, and his view tends to generalize fairly well the effect of Dos Passos'

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1 Matthew Josephson. "A Review of 1919," in Designed for Reading. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934, p. 231.
2 Malcolm Cowley. Literary Opinion in America, p. 499.

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1 Matthew Josephson. "A Review of 1919." In Designed for Reading. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934, p. 231.

2 Malcolm Cowley. Literary Opinion in America. p. 499.

techniques in U.S.A.:

> In Dos Passos' case, the leading idea is the one implicit in his subject and form: it is the idea that life is collective, that individuals are neither heroes nor villains, that their destiny is controlled by the drift of society as a whole."[1]

It is well to examine more closely the technique Dos Passos employs to secure this effect of destinies controlled by society's drift. In reading succeeding chapters, each devoted to a different character, it will be noted that each chapter is written in a prose style commensurate with the featured character's own outlook, mental level, and vocabulary. The story of each of the chief individuals is told in the third person, but it is, for the most part, narrated from the point of view of the first person. For instance, in the case of the rough-and-ready sailor Joe Williams, there is an unexaggerated monosyllabic prose style seemingly typical of that of an uneducated seaman: "He took Janey out to supper and to a show, but she talked just like everybody else did and bawled him out for cussing and he didn't have a very good time."[2]

In the case of Daughter, Dos Passos not only reproduces the way of speaking that might belong to a certain type of young woman, but he creates that sort of diction that such a woman might have used when she was a little girl:

The Trents lived in a house on Pleasant Avenue that

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1 Malcolm Cowley. "The End of a Trilogy," New Republic LXXXVIII (Aug. 12, 1936), 23.

2 Dos Passos. Nineteen Nineteen. New York: The Modern Library, 1938, p. 172.

> was the finest street in Dallas that was the biggest and fastest growing town in Texas that was the biggest state in the Union and had the blackest soil and the whitest people and America was the greatest country in the world and Daughter was Dad's onlyest sweetest little girl.[1]

Reading the long run-on sentences in the above quotation makes one think of the accelerated narrative technique employed in Manhattan Transfer. This illusion of speed may be due in part to Dos Passos' tendency to ignore any detailed analysis of a character's mind and motives. He is more concerned with the telescoping of lives and the dispensing with all introductory and transitional material. It should be noted that in the excerpt quoted from Joe Williams' chapter, a single sentence telescopes an evening's events into a few lines. In the quotation from the chapter on Daughter, an almost complete introduction of a new character is made in a single sentence, and her personality is sketched in effectively if hastily.

But there is certainly no analysis of Joe's thoughts and emotions as he talks to his waspish sister, nor is there any examination of Daughter's sub-adolescent view of life. Bernard DeVoto fears that such people as Joe and Daughter and the rest of the U.S.A. individuals have no emotions of any kind, nor do they have any intellectual life:

> It may be that you cannot show the interests and passions of the mind, its reveries, its analyses,

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1 Ibid., p. 256.

> its preoccupations, its satisfactions and anxieties, when you limit yourself to exhibiting only motor and verbal behavior. Certainly, no character in the trilogy thinks at all, none of them follows an idea for none has an idea to follow, and no intellectual value affects any of them in the least. But if that complete atrophy of the cerebrum must be charged to technical rigorousness, surely something other than technique is responsible for the atrophy of the emotions. A technique of fiction is only a means of presenting human beings--and human beings feel. But the automatons of Mr. Dos Passos do not feel.[1]

Other critics have said that Dos Passos' characters are almost entirely defeatists, revelers in sexual promiscuity, alcoholics, and sneerers at chastity. To a certain extent this assertion is true. Mac, Joe Williams, Charley Anderson, Dick Savage, Eveline Hutchins, Daughter, and Margo Dowling are involved in one round after another of intoxication and/or illicit fornication. DeVoto doesn't criticize them for their weaknesses in this respect, but he does complain that "they seem to enjoy neither the flesh nor the devil . . . they feel no lust and no love, nor any other of the common experiences of mankind."[2]

John Chamberlain gives a partial answer and explanation of DeVoto's criticism by pointing out that Dos Passos' characters are purposely revealed to be shallow and rootless people:

> . . . the characters in U.S.A. live not in relation to codes or values, but in relation to the headlines. Family life is conspicuously absent from the trilogy; human relationships are something to be snatched between wanderings on various missions. In becoming

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1 DeVoto, op. cit., p. 12.
2 Ibid., p. 13.

> all eyes and ears, victims of the suggestability of the radio, the newspaper, and the moving picture, mankind has lost its heart.[1]

The question may arise as to whether or not this constant reiteration of the automatic responses of shallow and rootless people is an actual contribution to a literary effect. Percy Boynton is of the opinion that Dos Passos presumes that life is only license:

> I read at random thirty pages from Nineteen Nineteen, and on more than half are references or descriptions to excessive drinking; I read thirty other pages, and on more than two-thirds there is promiscuous sexual intercourse. . . . waiving the question of propriety, one may still raise the question of taste, and if one concedes for the sake of the argument--which I do not--even the question of taste, one may plead that repetition is wearisome. A child repeats twenty, thirty times; a normal adult recognizes that if he has not made himself understood to adults at the third or fourth assertion, he may as well give up the attempt.[2]

Critic John McCole points out this same feature in Dos Passos' work. McCole feels that not one of the U.S.A. characters has a respectful attitude toward womanhood; McCole fears that the reader of U.S.A. will find himself

> . . . immersed in an entire sea of sensuality--sensuality that is deliberate, indiscriminate, and unnecessary. Indeed, the offensiveness which most readers will find in The Forty-Second Parallel and Nineteen Nineteen has, in The Big Money, become so pronounced as almost to shade off into the ridiculous. Charley Anderson, as a matter of fact, has so many mistresses that one is inclined to see in his defections about the same tragic proportions that one would find in the procreative activities of a good rooster.[3]

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1 John Chamberlain. "John Dos Passos," Saturday Review of Literature, XX (June 3, 1939), 14.
2 Boynton, op. cit., p. 193.
3 C. John McCole. Lucifer at Large. New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1937, p. 195.

McCole proceeds to enlarge upon the problem of sexual promiscuity as it is emphasized in U.S.A.:

> Take the problem, for instance, of our modern tendency to regard promiscuity as something of no consequence. Mr. Dos Passos has his character seek an answer here merely by acting, from the beginning, as if there were no answer. The way to organize one's moral life is so completely to disorganize it that there is no longer any need for organization.[1]

McCole appears to be implying in this last quotation that Dos Passos is using his characters merely as puppets in a pornographic tableau. This implication does not seem completely justifiable. The following analysis of Dos Passos' technique of character treatment is more benevolent, and perhaps more accurate:

> Dos Passos does not start out with a specific situation and then harness the characters to it with artificial reins.[2]

No, the reader watches the character go toward his zenith or his nadir by a sequence of logical events, unaided and unhampered by string-pulling or by the creation of unlikely coincidences upon the author's part.

Maxwell Geismar summarizes the U.S.A. characters' overall function in saying:

> If they are moulded by the social pressures of American culture, these Dos Passos people are also being pursued by their Fate--by the internal view of the writer now being projectedoutward into the patterns of our society. In this respect the entire

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2 Victor F. Calverton. The Liberation of American Literature. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932, p. 464.

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> American critique of Dos Passos may be viewed as the sociological embodiment of a point of view: the bitterness of his social analysis, the despair of his conclusions being not so much the historian's verdict as the poet's lament, and the discontents of American civilization becoming in part the symbols for those of an indignant and disturbed soul.[1]

There is another element in Dos Passos' methods of characterization which may be worth mentioning at this time. Many of the characters are shown to be deeply concerned with the problems of humanity. J. Ward Moorehouse ostensibly is interested in bettering the relations between capital and labor, between the Red Cross and the people of Europe whom it wishes to help, and between the conquering Allied governments and the people of the geographical areas which are to be apportioned to the victors as prizes for their successes on the battlefield or at the tables of the peace conference. But the reader can see that Moorehouse is interested mainly in feathering his own next. Whenever he writes a brochure or conducts a reconciliation between management and dissatisfied employees, he appears neutral upon the surface, but he is secretly backing and being aided by the industrialists. When Moorehouse talks to G. H. Barrow, the labor organizer, and Senator Planet, the corrupt politician, together, he appears as neutral, as open-minded, and as public-spirited as anyone could hope to be:

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1 Maxwell D. Geismar. Writers in Crisis. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1942, p. 128.

> "Capital and labor," he began in a slow careful voice as if dictating, "as you must have noticed, gentlemen, in the course of your varied and useful careers, capital and labor, those two great forces of our national life neither of which can exist without the other are growing further and further apart; any cursory glance at the newspapers will tell you that. Well, it has occurred to me that one reason for this unfortunate state of affairs has been the lack of any private agency that might fairly present the situation to the public. The lack of properly distributed information is the cause of most of the misunderstandings in this world . . . The great leaders of American capital, as you probably realize, Mr. Barrow, are firm believers in fairplay and democracy and are only too anxious to give the worker his share of the proceeds of industry if they can only see their way to do so in fairness to the public and the investor. After all, the public is the investor whom we all aim to serve."[1]

The day after delivering this vague, platitudinous speech, Moorehouse addresses a Rotary Club gathering made up mainly of employers. His speech has a different flavor because there is no labor organizer in his audience, but the vague, platitudinous tinge remains in his language:

> "Cooperation . . . stockownership giving the employee an interest in the industry . . . avoiding the grave dangers of socialism and demagoguery and worse . . . It is in such a situation that the public relations counsel can step in in a quiet manly way and say, Look here, men, let's talk this over eye to eye . . . But his main importance is in times of industrial peace . . . when two men are sore and just about to hit one another is no time to preach public service to them . . . The time for an educational campaign and an oral crusade that will drive home to the rank and file of the mighty colossus of American uptodate industry is right now, today."[2]

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1 The 42nd Parallel, p. 270.
2 Ibid., p. 273.

The fact that Moorehouse is out to fleece his clients, regardless of whether they are the "haves" or the "have-nots," is well illustrated by the manner in which he greets the visitors to his office. He places them in chairs facing a "steelbright" light and has his English butler constantly encumbering them with tea-cups, whiskies and soda, etc., while he, Moorehouse, does all the talking, very much at ease behind his desk.

Moorehouse is not the only example of a Dos Passos character who is superficially worried about humanity's problems and deeply concerned with his own personal gains. Moorehouse is, however, the crowning example of such an individual. Lesser lights who are allegedly doing their bit for the good of mankind are represented by Eleanor Stoddard, who serves the Red Cross in France in an executive capacity, but who spends most of her time in voluptuous living. Eveline Hutchins likewise devotes her wartime career to following the debutante crowd to Paris in the guise of a Red Cross Worker. Perhaps Eveline Hutchins' real reason for leaving the United States in 1917 was to look for a husband. When she found an American soldier as a temporarily satisfactory mate and came home with him after the war, she turned to the life of a basker in the pale light of reflected glory from her associations with second-rate writers and artists. Her entertainment of the pseudo-great and the near-great individuals was not for the purpose of doing them any honor nor bestowing upon them any kindly

hospitality. It was only a means of building up her own feeling of importance and also a means of escaping from boredom temporarily.

Dick Savage loses his battle to remain a sensitive aesthete and joins Moorehouse in the business of making money in public relations counselling and in handling large advertising accounts.

Charley Anderson starts off his post-war career by developing devices for making airplane engines more reliable and efficient. When the yearning for the "big money" conquers him, he forgets his job as an inventor and manufacturer and becomes a plunger in the stock market.

Not all of the major characters are in the category of spiritual degenerates. Mary French and Ben Compton carry on their fight for the radical labor movement in spite of their beatings, physical, emotional, and economic. They are sincere in their motives to the end, regardless of their sometimes misguided efforts.

Involved with this problem of character handling is Dos Passos' technique of rendering the life-like logic and syntax of his character's thoughts. When Eveline Hutchins is separated from her friends during the Armistice celebration in Paris, Dos Passos employs a sort of internal-external narrative form in which the reader sees the individual in some mode of action and at the same time sees in part the character's thoughts:

A minute later she realized she'd lost the

> car and her friends and was scared. She couldn't recognize the streets even, in this new Paris full of arclights and flags and bands and drunken people. She found herself dancing with the little sailor in the asphalt square in front of a church with two towers, then with a French colonial officer in a red cloak, then with a Polish legionnaire who spoke a little English and had lived in Newark, New Jersey, and then suddenly some young French soldiers were dancing in a ring around her holding hands. The game was you had to kiss one of them to break the ring. When she caught on she kissed one of them and everybody clapped and cheered and cried Vive l'Amerique. Another bunch came and kept on and on dancing around her until she began to feel scared.[1]

This passage may also be illustrative of the Dos Passos technique of accelerated narrative which has been discussed before. It also exemplifies the previously considered use of a prose style which is appropriate to the character's education and point of view. Bernard DeVoto might say that it also exemplifies the consideration of only the motor or verbal responses of the character to the situation.

* * * * *

It appears that in U.S.A., as in Manhattan Transfer, one of the main features of American life which Dos Passos is accentuating is the rapidity with which people carry on the business of living. Some further significance can be derived from U.S.A. in a short analysis of the titles of the three novels which make up the complete work.

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1 Nineteen Nineteen, p. 293.

But first, a look at the title of the trilogy itself gives the reader the obvious impression that the volume is an effort to portray a nation. Dos Passos has sought to sculpture a cross-section block of the United States and its people into an artistic monolith of prose fiction. The usually censorious DeVoto has this to say about how well the novelist has succeeded in completing this effect:

> Mr. Dos Passos does indeed cover the continent from ocean to ocean, from farm to factory, from mine to mill, from proletariat to the master class. And he has mastered his details. He knows the provinces and geographies of America, the rituals and etiquettes, the creeds and superstitions, the avenues of tradition, the lines of force, the flowing shape of things. He has got a greater variety of them into fiction than any other novelist of his time.[1]

The first novel of the trilogy, The 42nd Parallel, derives its title from a meteorological reference to the track followed by most of the storms which travel from west to east across the United States. New York City, the Mecca for many modern adventurers and thrill and profit-seeking Americans, is located near the forty-second parallel of latitude. People, like storms, drift in the direction of New York; people, by the same token, seem (from Dos Passos' viewpoint) not to be guided in their direction of travel by a conscious will, but by some omniscent and incomprehensible fate.

In The 42nd Parallel Dos Passos has endeavored to catch

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1 DeVoto, op. cit., p. 3.

> the movement of a whole economic process extending over two generations, the development of industrial America. . . . The novel pictures the flow of population which has reversed the westward expansion of pioneer days, proceeding eastward to New York. The narrative centers on the lives of four pieces of humanity representing different geographical, social and economic backgrounds, all driven like leaves before the storm to New York.[1]

Nineteen Nineteen, the second novel of the trilogy, is named for the year in which the first pangs of disillusionment were felt in the twentieth century's attitude toward war.

> Dos Passos gets nearly every phase of life in the United States in the chaotic year 1919 before the eye of his literary motion-picture camera. . . . Not only is the casual aimlessness and lack of meaning in these particular lives of the four main characters conveyed, but also the ramifying social effects of war are portrayed, the cynical diplomacy, the political hypocrisy, profiteering, the conditioning of individual lives by social forces.[2]

The third novel in U.S.A., The Big Money, sounds the keynote for the Mammon-worship to which the author attributes some of the chief ills of contemporary civilization. The novel gives the reader an intimate look at Detroit, Miami, and Hollywood, as well as the usual examination of New York City.[3] Money to be made and to be spent is the featured attraction of all the cities; money is similarly worshipped in the small midwestern town from which Charley Anderson goes to the larger municipalities. It is the desire for fast and easy money that leads to Charley Anderson's downfall and death. It is the lure

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1 Halford E. Luccock. Contemporary American Literature and Religion. New York: Willett, Clark and Company, 1934, p. 149.
2 Ibid., p. 194.
3 DeVoto, op. cit., p. 3.

of the stage and the cinema with their attendant opportunities for the acquisition of money and fame that leads Margo Dowling to rent her body so many times to so many different men of influence. It is the desire to get the working man a larger share of the money being retained in the coffers of the capitalists that leads Mary French to sacrifice her education, her friends, her chastity, and almost her life for a cause in which her efforts are frequently unappreciated and unrewarded.

Thus, after examining the titles of the novels, it is appropriate to look at some of the technical devices employed in the trilogy for enlarging and pointing up the ideas which the titles symbolize. The characters are frequently unrelated to one another in the same manner that some of the main figures in Manhattan Transfer were unaware of each other. However, in U.S.A. more emphasis is placed upon the implied relationship of the characters' stories, one to the other.

> What holds these narratives together is not any web of intrigue or chain of circumstance. These persons belong together because they are being swept along by the same forces, a fact that Dos Passos indicates by interrupting the story of one to tell the story of another, and emphasizes by making his reader aware of broad social movements in the background.[1]

These "broad social movements in the background" are illustrated by the three technical devices called "Newsreel," "The Camera Eye," and the biographical sketch. Perhaps these literary

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1 Hicks, op. cit., p. 289.

innovations were originated to create the effect of unity and contemporaneousness between the author, the characters, and the actual historical events and personages involved in the trilogy. At the end of each chapter telling of the career of a fictional figure, one or more of the three devices is inserted as a sort of commentary of contrast or comparison upon the chapter which has just been read or upon the chapter which is to come next.

The sixty-seven pieces of "Newsreel" in the trilogy interject into the narrative bits of headlines, oddly (but not haphazardly) assorted newspaper clippings, snatches of popular songs, and slogans and catchwords of the particular day or month. This is an enlargement of the technique used in Manhattan Transfer of inserting into the narrative the newspaper story fragments and advertising catchwords. In Manhattan Transfer, however, these insertions were an integral part of the narrative itself. In U.S.A. they are isolated in one-page or two-page sections of their own.

The newspaper stories definitely date the events in the life of the fictional characters; but this is perhaps a function secondary in importance to the more subtle suggestion which is the cumulative effect of all the "Newsreel" sections. It is the apparent hit-or-miss jumble of miscellaneous news items which gives an oblique view of the mentality which produces and is in turn fostered by the modern American newspaper. The news of every kind--scandal, disaster, popular amusement, politics--is run together in paragraphs without benefit of punctuation.

Such selections are separated from one another by headlines of varying faces of large type. Perhaps the average reader of a daily paper (especially those people who read standing up in a subway train) is forced to read his journal in just that kind of an unpunctuated, run-together, hit-or-miss manner. At any rate, the newspaper itself, which does not classify its news as to kind on a certain page, almost inadvertently creates on its front page a strange mélange of reading matter. The result of the latest World Series game is placed in a column side by side with the story of the assassination of the King of Jugoslavia. In the late 1930's this actually happened early in October; the baseball game, as a matter of fact, received a much larger headline than did the story of the ruler's death.

It has been pointed out that the discerning reader should see an obvious shape and direction to Dos Passos' work indicated in the form and make-up of this "Newsreel" device.[1] Dos Passos is not only showing what is going on in the world at large at the same time that some event is occurring in the life of a fictional character, he is revealing, subtly perhaps, that the worldwide happenings will have a distinct bearing upon the career of the particular character. Then, too, the whole trend of world events, the relationship of everything of significance that happens in Russia, England, France, Germany, and the United

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1 Beach. American Fiction 1920--1940, p. 59.

States, is somehow revealed. This is most obvious in "Newsreel" XV in which some of the prelude to the first World War is played:

WANT BIG WAR OR NONE

the mannequin who is such a feature of the Paris racecourse surpasses herself in the launching of novelties. She will put on the most amazing costume and carry it with perfect sangfroid. Inconsistency is her watchword.

Three German staff officers who passed nearby were nearly mobbed by enthusiastic people who insisted on shaking their hands.

* * *

DANUBE SHOTS SIGNAL FOR EARLY STRIFE

I'm against capital punishment as are all levelminded women. I hate tothink any woman would attend a hanging. It is a terrible thing for the state to commit murder.

CZAR LOSES PATIENCE WITH AUSTRIA

panic in exodus from Carlsbad disappearance of Major reveals long series of assassinations decollete in broad daylight lingerie frocks that by no possible means could be associated with the tub What shall be worn next? Paris cries choirboys go camping professor to tour woods Belgrade Falls

GENERAL WAR NEAR

ASSASSIN SLAYS DEPUTY JAURES[1]

It is claimed by some critics that these "Newsreels" admirably reveal the mores of each year, and that the various items in them are so arranged that they become a subtly ironic

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1 The 42nd Parallel, p. 263.

comment on the items that follow them.[1] There are probably numerous readers and critics of Dos Passos who fail to appreciate the "Newsreel" technique on such grounds, but the concensus is that this device is an unusual literary feature, and not an unsuccessful one.

"The Camera Eye" is not as unusual an invention as the "Newsreel," perhaps because the average reader has been exposed to stream-of-consciousness writing before coming into any contact with Dos Passos' novels. The purpose of "The Camera Eye" is probably original, however. Before the beginning of each chapter of one of the fictional character's adventures, there is usually placed one of "The Camera Eye" sections. Whenever a significant event occurs in the life of a major character, Dos Passos reveals his own reactions to a similar event in his own life or else records an event which was taking place in his own life at the same time. Upon occasion this stream-of-consciousness piece is inserted before the chapter in which its corresponding fictional happening is to occur, as has been mentioned before; less frequently it is placed after the event.

To illustrate, it is well to examine "The Camera Eye" numbered forty-four and to note that it precedes a chapter in which Charley Anderson arrives home and is called upon to make several speeches before the local service clubs in the manner frequently required of returning veterans of the first World

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1 Henry Hazlitt. "Kaleidoscope," Nation, CXXX (1930), 298.

War. Dos Passos recalls in a "Camera Eye" section a similar experience he had in the Near East in having to be crammed into a rented tuxedo to tell of his war experiences, and again, an embarrassing time in New York City after the war when he was called upon to speak before a group of bored listeners:

> who arriving in Manhattan finds waiting again
> the forsomebodyelsetailored dress suit
> the position offered the opportunity presented
> the collarbutton digging into the adamsapple while a
> wooden image croaks down a table at two rows of
> freshlypressed gentlemen who wear fashionably their
> tailored names
> stuffed into shirts to caption miles lightyears
> of clipped streamers of newsprint[1]

Dos Passos does not tell the reader that it is the author himself who is the growing boy and aging man in "The Camera Eye," but there are many items in the series of impressions which he gives that correspond to actual experiences in Dos Passos' own life. The reader sees a little boy traveling in Europe with his mother; the lad is seen on a train passing into Maryland; he is shown to be frightened by the sinister atmosphere of pre-1914 Mexico; he listens avidly to a mysterious "He" who recites passages from Othello in a lawyer's voice and who tells the boy about his own experiences as a youth in jumping into Philadelphia's Schuylkill River. All of these scenes are excerpts from the author's own early life. Dos Passos' experiences in preparatory school, at Harvard, in the War, in the Near East, in writing of the labor problems of the

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1 The Big Money, p. 31.

1920's and early 1930's, and his various trips to Cuba and Mexico are all considered in sequential episodes of "The Camera Eye."

Malcolm Cowley has the opinion that "The Camera Eye" serves the purpose of supplying the "inwardness" that is lacking in Dos Passos' general narrative in U.S.A. Cowley fears that the collective novelist (and he considers Dos Passos to be a collective novelist) is tempted to:

> . . . overemphasize the blindness and impotence of individuals caught in the rip tides of history. He is obliged to devote less space to each of his characters, to relate their adventures more hastily, with the result that he always seems to be approaching them from the outside.[1]

Perhaps Cowley is right. At any rate, Dos Passos has created in "The Camera Eye" an interesting device for allowing subjective, impressionistic artistry to relieve the monotony of objective, naturalistic narrative. The following series of impressions are obviously taken from scenes in war-time Paris. In their playing upon the less chaotic aspects of war-time living, they stand out in sharp contrast to the sordidness of the lives led by Dick Savage and Eveline Hutchins, whose narratives stand on either side of this particular "Camera Eye" selection:

> there were always two cats the color of hot milk with a little coffee in it with aquamarine eyes and sootblack faces in the window of the laundry opposite the little creamery where we ate breakfast on the Montague St. Genevieve huddled between the

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1 Cowley. Literary Opinion in America, p. 503.

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1 Cowley, Literary Opinion in America, p. 602.

> old squeezedup slategrey houses of the Latin Quarter leaning over steep small streets rosy under the fog minute streets lit with different colored chalks cluttered with infinitesimal bars restaurants paint-shops and old prints beds bidets faded perfumery microscopic sizzle of frying butter[1]

The third major innovation in U.S.A. is the biographical sketch of the significant contemporary American. Twenty-seven real-life figures of the period from 1900 to 1930 are placed under the Dos Passos spotlight, and their rises or falls are microscopically examined in from two to twelve pages each. These individuals are some of the representative people of the United States during the first thirty years of the twentieth century. Their brief biographies are scattered throughout the trilogy so as to contrast and compare the lives of actual people with the lives of the fictional characters next to whose narratives the biographies are printed. These sketches perhaps sum up the national achievement, the official contribution of the United States to modern culture.[2]

An interesting comparison is possible with one of the biographies, especially. This sketch precedes a bit of fictional narrative which tells of one of the characters in U.S.A. who is very similar to the real man documented by Dos Passos. The two-page biography tells of Joe Hill, a Swede who went to sea, learned English in the forecastle, found his way to the United States, read the theories of Karl Marx, joined the

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1 Nineteen Nineteen, p..215.
2 Beach, American Fiction 1920--1940, p. 59.

I.W.W., played his concertina and wrote popular songs for strikers, workers, and labor organizers to sing, became too successful and too popular as a labor leader and songwriter, was framed by politicians for a murder he didn't commit, was executed, cremated, and his ashes scattered to the wind. This is the general pattern of Joe Hill's career as Dos Passos tells it. The fictional counterpart, Ben Compton, is a second generation American, who is born in Brooklyn of Jewish parents, becomes a helper on a construction gang, takes part in his first strike the year he graduates from high school, picks up a girl who works for the radical labor movement, joins the I.W.W., is beaten up by a sheriff's deputies for working in labor agitation, registers for the draft in the first World War as a conscientious objector, refuses to serve in the Army and is sent to the Atlanta penitentiary for ten years.

To add to the impact of this double-dose of vividly portrayed injustice, Dos Passos follows up Ben Compton's fictional narrative with another biographical sketch, this time an extremely powerful and brutal portrait of a Pacific slope logger's attempts to organize a timberworkers' union. Wesley Everest, the Homeric protagonist, is of such heroic stature that Dos Passos dubs him and his story "Paul Bunyan." Wesley Everest is strong, brave, skilled in the use of weapons, but, like an Ajax, he is not brilliant. The labor meeting which he organizes in Centralia, Washington, is broken up by an organized mob from the American Legion, the Chamber of Commerce, and

other civic-minded groups. The timberworkers' hall is destroyed because the civic groups feel that labor unions are tinged with Bolshevism. Wesley Everest tries to fight back; he is captured, mutilated, and finally lynched by the mob.

It is in biographical sketches like this that Dos Passos allows his feeling for irony to fully emerge:

> Before Armistice Day, 1919, the town was full of rumors that on that day the hall would be raided for keeps. A young man of good family and pleasant manners, Warren O. Grimm, had been an officer with the American force in Siberia; that made him an authority on labor and Bolsheviks, so he was chosen by the business men to lead the 100% forces in the Citizens Protective League to put the fear of God into Paul Bunyan.
>
> The first thing the brave patriots did was pick up a blind newsdealer and thrash him and drop him in a ditch across the county line.
>
> The loggers consulted counsel and decided they had a right to defend their hall and themselves in case of a raid. Not a thing in this world Paul Bunyan's ascared of.[1]

In striking contrast to the Wesley Everest tragedy is the success story of Samuel Insull who built up a gigantic financial empire in the early decades of the twentieth century and then was caught in the 1929 crash. Dos Passos entitles the Insull sketch "Power Superpower." Like Wesley Everest, Insull was a man of heroic proportions, although the financier's force was economic, not purely physical. Insull, however, did not meet with the tragic disaster he apparently deserved:

When it was discovered that he was using the stock-

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1 Nineteen Nineteen, p. 458.

> holders' funds to pay off his brothers' brokerage accounts it was too thick even for a federal judge. Insull was forced to resign.[1]

But Insull was voted $18,000 a year for a pension by the companies he had controlled. Then he fled to Canada and to Europe to escape the prosecution that the public was clamoring for. When Insull was finally brought back for trial, he hired lawyers who enmeshed the prosecution in a web of technicalities. He and his brother wept on the witness stand. The judge and jury wept too:

> Finally driven to the wall by the prosecuting attorney Samuel Insull blurted out that yes, he had made an error of some ten milliondollars in accounting but that it had been an honest error. Verdict: Not Guilty.[2]

Dos Passos' sketches of successful figures like Insull seem to symbolize the author's view of the average American's form of hero-worship. He shows how the courtroom audience cried when Insull wept on the witness stand. The ruined investors in his companies felt that Insull had been ruined in the crash along with the little stockholders. They felt that "the captain had gone down with his ship."[3]

Charley Anderson, the fictional character who seeks to rise from garage mechanic to airplane engine inventor to financier, is under the spell of this hero-worship although Dos Passos never advises the reader of this fact in so many words.

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1 The Big Money, p. 529.
2 Ibid., p. 532.
3 Loc. cit.

Dos Passos paints the rise of Henry Ford, the inventions of the Wright brothers, and the industrial efficiency schemes of Frederick Winslow Taylor. Charley Anderson's story partially parallels the careers of these three real-life figures. For the most part, the trio succeeded in fulfilling their purposes. Charley Anderson was killed during a drunken race with a locomotive before he had done more than make a ruin of his life. It may be that Dos Passos is contrasting the purposelessness of the lives of some of his fictional characters with the purposefulness of the lives of some of the prominent Americans who made good.[1]

The rise of Margo Dowling to Hollywood stardom is comparable in some respects to factual biographies of two famous figures in the theatrical world of her time. A sketch of the life of Isadora Duncan precedes Margo's initial chapter, and a short biography of Rudolph Valentino follows it. Both the uninhibited dancer and the well-groomed Sheik had stormy careers; both died shortly after they had reached a peak in the entertainment world. Margo reaches the top in a similarly tempestuous manner, and then her story ends. She appears to have gained almost the greatest possible material success (for a woman) through the libidinously shrewd rental of her physical charms. How purposeful she was in contrast to Isadora and the

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1 Boynton. op. cit., p. 196.

Sheik is not clearly indicated, but it does seem apparent that Margo had a purposeful urge to rise above her humble beginnings and her miserable and graceless marriage; Isadora had the urge to present her interpretation of the dance as freely and as frankly as her personal muse, Terpsichore, might direct her; the Sheik wanted to become famous in the entertainment world; when he became famous, he wanted to become known as a he-man, not as a gigolo transplanted in a desert environment.

Perhaps this sort of thing shows how the patterns of American society distort and prostitute America's talent.[1] The desire for money, fame, and power, and the widespread reverence for those people who already have money, fame, and power, seem to be among the social evils which Dos Passos is attacking in U.S.A. The biographies help to sum up this attitude on the author's part; they aid in tying the whole trilogy together.

In U.S.A. Dos Passos reinvigorated the novel of social criticism.[2] Whether or not he actually improved upon novels of social criticism which had been written before his time is a question for the literary critics to ponder. It does seem fairly certain, however, that the inclusion in one composition of so many personal histories of fictional American citizens, of subjective prose poems, of representative excerpts from the

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1 Geismar, op. cit., p. 112.
2 Ibid., p. 129.

daily recordings of song and story in a thirty-year period, and of the factual biographies of the larger-statured Americans of the time has made manifest a sociological exhibit which has made a sincere attempt to illustrate the American culture of our times.[1]

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1 Beach. American Fiction 1920--1940, p. 360.

Chapter V

THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

Maxwell Geismar enthusiastically terms the U.S.A. trilogy "the most profound creative study of our cultural patterns given to us by an American novelist."[1] This glowing statement might be amended to say that Dos Passos has given us a creative study of our cultural patterns as they existed in a specific thirty-year period of American history. This gives rise to several questions: (1) Will Dos Passos' novelistic techniques in revealing cultural patterns have any degree of influence upon writers of the future? (2) Are the characteristic evils of the first third of the twentieth century representative of the universal and eternal evils about which great literature is so often written?

It is not possible to answer either of those questions with a simple "yes" or "no." The first query cannot be discussed with much decisiveness for the next forty or fifty years. There have been quite naturally some conscious and unconscious imitators of Dos Passos' style and methods. Some of these imitators will be commented upon later in this chapter, but no one can be certain of the validity of any pronouncements on works that have stood the test of such a

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1 Geismar, op. cit., p. 129.

short space of time. The second question can be discussed with a little less of pure speculation. Many American critics believe that Dos Passos' claim to fame is based not upon the grandeur of his literary concepts nor upon his handling of themes embracing the eternal verities. They feel rather that it is his technical experiments which make him a significant writer for study and discussion. Yet there must be some aspect of profundity in his work which will give it an enduring quality. Perhaps it is the implication within his novels that there is some evolutionary connection "between our spiritual state and some profound metabolism in the social body."[1]

This element has been hinted at in relation to the discussion of Three Soldiers and Manhattan Transfer; it has been enlarged upon in the discussion of U.S.A., especially as regards the combined significance of "The Camera Eye," "Newsreel," and the biographical sketch. These technical devices, considered by themselves, are probably not likely to be of lasting importance. Dos Passos has not employed anything exactly similar to them since he completed The Big Money in 1936. Also, he has not dealt with anything approaching the "collectivist"novel since the trilogy was finished.

The next novel after the publication of U.S.A. was The Adventures of a Young Man (1939). There was no attempt made

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1 Beach. The Twentieth Century Novel, p. 548.

in this work to simulate any of the devices of the trilogy. The book presents an orderly narrative about a Columbia University professor's son named Glenn Spotswood who is hired and fired from various jobs around the country; after a time he takes up the cause of the striking coal miners. Glenn is unmoved by the unmoral or amoral attitudes of his associates in the labor movement, but he does become indignant at the Fascistic violence practiced by the Communistic forces behind the strike. He finds "that he can fight for freedom in his present alliance only by surrendering all freedom of judgment, will, and action. He goes to Spain as a defender of democracy, as John Andrews of Three Soldiers went to France, and in a new subjection of self to the cause of liberty he is coldbloodedly sent to his death by fellow revolutionists"[1] who select this method of liquidating a man who prefers helping humanity in the large rather than completely devoting himself to the cause of a single political ideology.

James T. Farrell sees some relationship between U.S.A. and The Adventures of a Young Man, however, in spite of the apparent conventionality of the latter novel:

> U.S.A. is a series of fictional biographies outlining the destinies of a number of Americans in a given period of time. The Adventures of a Young Man is a fictional biography of one American over a given period of time, most of which overlaps that in U.S.A. Dos Passos builds his fictional biographies out of

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1 Boynton, op. cit., p. 199.

> documentation. The basis of his documentation for The Adventures of a Young Man is different in some of its content, but not in kind, from that underlying U.S.A. Dos Passos is concerned with the unfolding patterns of American life, the course of American destinies, showing by such an unfoldment the character of American society, and the manner in which this society either destroys integrity, or ruins those who struggle to maintain it.[1]

Farrell seems to have hit upon one note of significance in regard to the idea that The Adventures of a Young Man is a fictional biography of one American. The effectiveness of using one man's story to point out the dangers in both extreme left-wing and extreme right wing politics in the United States and abroad may be a little debatable.

However, in 1943 Dos Passos published another novel, Number One, a recital of the dangers of Fascistic demagoguery. It can be said, then, that The Adventures of a Young Man reveals the hypocrisies behind the Communistic movements, whereas Number One deals with the rise and fall of an attempt at rightist dictatorship.

Perhaps the only effort toward a development of a literary technique in The Adventures of a Young Man was the use of a single fictional biography to illustrate some of the wrongs of politics in the Marxian manner. There is a slight carryover from U.S.A. in this younger novel in a measure apart from its socio-political significance: the enlargement of the reference

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1 James T. Farrell. "Dos Passos and the Critics," American Mercury, XLVII (1939), p. 491.

frame which was gained from a use of widely separated geographical areas like New York, Texas, the Kentucky coal fields, and the Spanish battlefields of 1936 and 1937.

In Number One there is employed the unusual, though not completely original, technique of "projecting a fictional character in the image of a known historical figure--which makes of the reader a judge rather than a collaborator."[1] The model for the Fascistic demagogue from deep American South is obviously the late Senator from Louisiana, Huey Long. Long appears in the person of one Chuck Crawford whose story is a parallel of Long's own career, although the former is not an exact transcript of the latter.

> The five great chapters of the book are five great slices cut across this man's career; and one scarcely knows whether to admire more the feeling for language or the insight into a type, of Chuck's creator.
>
> Each chapter is preceded by a prose poem, the recurrent theme of which is set forth in the opening sentence of the novel: "When you try to find the people, always in the end it comes down to somebody." Then, after the fashion of some of his earlier novels, Mr. Dos Passos sketches in rapid succession a series of American vignettes. Thus he makes clear the underlying social purpose of his document . . .[2]

The prose poem vignettes preceding each of the five chapters are summarized in a final poem following the fifth chapter; the purpose of these devices is to produce a group of word-portraits of typical Americans: a forlorn Southern farmer

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1 Margaret Marshall. "Notes by the Way," Nation, CLVI (1943), p. 384.

2 Howard Mumford Jones. "Sound Truck Caesar," Saturday Review of Literature, XXVI (March 6, 1943), p. 7.

trying to earn a living from worn-out soil; a middle-aged auto mechanic; a seventeen-year old store clerk; a poverty-stricken coal miner and a sleek, well-paid miners' union representative; a bored minor executive in a business office. The final poem lumps together a score of one-sentence portraits, and ends upon Number One's keynote:

> neighbors, wives, children, the postman who comes to the door, the woman who works in the kitchen, the man higher up;
> weak as the weakest, strong as the strongest,
> the people are the republic,
> the people are you.[1]

This recurrent theme, as Howard Mumford Jones calls it, is manifested in the narrative proper when Tyler Spotswood, Chuck Crawford's secretary, is left to take the blame for some government land manipulations that the politician has been engineering for his own profit. Tyler is indicted by the courts for perjury when he tries to protect Crawford in his testimony. He receives a long-delayed letter from his dead brother (Glenn Spotswood, the protagonist of The Adventures of a Young Man); the keynote of the novel is reiterated in the letter:

> Tyler, what I'd started to write you about was not letting them sell out too much of the for the people and by the people part of the oldtime United States way. It has given us freedom to grow. Growing great people is what the country's for, isn't it? So long as the growth of people to greater stature all around is what we want more than anything, it will keep on. But we've got to make more and more

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1 Dos Passos. Number One. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1943, p. 304.

> of the promises come true. If we let too few kinds of people find space to grow in our system, nobody will believe in it any longer. If not enough people believe in a way of life, it comes to an end and is gone.[1]

In the end Tyler Spotswood sounds the keynote once more, this time in his own words. He finally comes to his senses (although, as was his wont throughout the novel, he is nearly drunk) and realizes that he has been a mere tool in the hands of the power-mad politician:

> . . . We can't sell out on the people, but the trouble is that me, I'm just as much the people as you are or any other son of a bitch. If we want to straighten the people out we've got to start with number one, not that big wind . . . You know what I mean. I got to straighten myself out first, see . . .[2]

* * *

The impressionistic techniques that Dos Passos employed to such a large extent in Manhattan Transfer and in "The Camera Eye" passages of U.S.A. are hardly noticeable in The Adventures of a Young Man or in Number One. In the past decade he has made use of subjective impressionism and his other literary devices mainly in his works of non-fiction. Tour of Duty (1946), a journal of the author's visits to the various scenes of World War II, features the abrupt transition from one scene to another in the same manner as the earlier examples of his novels. For instance, in a section of Tour of Duty

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1 Ibid., p. 282.
2 Ibid., p. 297.

devoted to interviews and recordings of conversations between War Correspondent Dos Passos and some members of the American armed forces on one of the Pacific islands, there is the following pronounced hiatus between a conversation and a bit of straight narrative:

> "Son," said our friend the mechanic, "you don't need to talk. You young fellers don't need to talk who ain't even married yet. You don't know what it's like for us old guys." His voice dropped gruffly. "You don't know what it is to have home cookin'."
>
> In the radio station that night they were playing over a recording they had made the Sunday before of Marshallese singing.[1]

Tour of Duty is also noteworthy because of the great number of characters brought into view. This is reminiscent of Dos Passos' technique in his earlier novels also. These numerous individuals are interrogated by the narrator or by other figures in the scene. Army and Navy officers and enlisted men, missionaries, American civilian prisoners of the Japanese, Polynesians, Filipinos, Nuremberg trial prosecutors, Russians, Germans, Frenchmen, and Englishmen march on Dos Passos' stage, stop and talk for a moment, then move out of the reader's sight.

In regard to the use of a wide variety of geographical areas, a technique characteristic of U.S.A. and partly characteristic of The Adventures of a Young Man, the reader sees in

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1 Dos Passos. Tour of Duty. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1946, p. 16.

Tour of Duty a multitude of scenes including San Francisco, Pearl Harbor, a plane above the South Pacific, the Marianas, the Philippines, Austria, Germany, France, and a ship en route from Europe to the United States.

Edmund Wilson has pointed out in Tour of Duty that Dos Passos has echoed another one of his novelistic techniques in the very manner in which he inventories "all the objects in the external scene rather than to get inside the people who inhabit it."[1] However, Wilson develops his criticism further with a more flattering comment:

> The whole story, in fact, has the merits of the best of Dos Passos' fiction. The trained eye for inventory, instead of arresting the action, here serves to feed the narrative with a succession of scenes and backgrounds each of which, as it passes, is firmly grasped and presented in all its detail, and the whole story has the same kind of effectiveness as the life histories of U.S.A.: that of experience lived through by the reader almost without his being aware of the medium of prose that carried it.[2]

In view of the fact that Dos Passos has carried on the use of his own literary devices at least partially in some of his latest work, it will be interesting to notice any of his contemporaries who seem to have imitated him or who may have been influenced by him. The year 1948 is still so close to the period in which Dos Passos wrote his Manhattan Transfer and his U.S.A. that it is difficult to ascertain what novelists,

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1 Edmund Wilson. "Dos Passos in the Pacific," New Yorker XXII (Aug. 24, 1946), 61.
2 loc. cit.

if any, have followed in his footsteps. However, it is possible to point out a few writers who have used techniques akin to those of Dos Passos with some degree of success.

Granville Hicks names Nathan Asch's The Office (1925) and Pay Day (1930) as apparent imitators of Manhattan Transfer. Both of the Asch novels are efforts toward the "complex" novel, as Hicks terms it.[1] It seems doubtful, however, that The Office could have been under the Dos Passos influence to any extent in view of the fact that it was published in the same year as Manhattan Transfer, the first work in which Dos Passos attempted a "complex" novel. As regards Pay Day, it appears that judgment will have to be held in abeyance upon this novel until it becomes available, if ever it does so. Pay Day is supposedly a typical twenty-four hour period in the life of an office clerk. Apparently an office clerk's typical day is a dreadfully sordid one according to Nathan Asch, for Pay Day has been banned almost universally.

The Office, if it was an imitation of the Dos Passos' method, is an awfully pale and skeletal facsimile of Manhattan Transfer. The first two chapters of The Office give a pseudo-impressionistic picture of Wall Street and the inside machinery of a brokerage firm. There is no artistic selection of detail. The first chapter begins with the following list of

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1 Hicks, op. cit., p. 317.

nouns and adjectives:

New York -- downtown -- streets -- buildings -- firms

streets -- short -- crooked -- narrow -- dark

are crowded -- teeming -- undulating -- festering

passers-by -- strollers -- walkers -- loiterers[1]

The third chapter involves the first of fourteen individual stories in which some of the persons involved in the office's work are followed about through the city upon the day on which the office fails. The lowliest clerk sees only a discouraging future ahead of him. Mr. Read, the office's chief executive, figures that he can always open another office and thus continue his respectable social and economic position. This last aspect of The Office at least touches upon a Dos Passos view of life: Mr. Read perhaps lives a purposeful existence, and the lowliest clerk is perhaps meant to be a purposeless individual. This situation is not clearly implied so it may be possible that Granville Hicks is allowing his vision to be obscured by the faint reddish tinge which stains the novels of Nathan Asch and the earlier works of Dos Passos.

C. John McCole mentions William Saroyan as a possible imitator of Dos Passos' techniques, and, not too surprisingly,

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1 Nathan Asch. The Office. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1925, p. 9.

nouns and adjectives:

New York -- downtown -- streets -- buildings -- time

streets -- short -- crooked -- narrow -- dark

are crowded -- teeming -- undulating -- festering

pa-nera-by -- strollers -- talkers -- loiterers

The third chapter involves the first of fourteen individual stories in which some of the persons involved in the office's work are followed about through the city upon the day on which the office fails. The lowliest clerk sees only a discouraging future ahead of him. Mr. Read, the office's chief executive, figures that he can always open another office and thus continue his respectable social and economic position. This last aspect of The Office at least touches upon a more Passos view of life: Mr. Read perhaps lives a purposeful existence, and the lowliest clerk is certainly purposeless individual. This situation is not clearly implied so it may be possible that Greenville Bloxe is allowing his vision to be obscured by the faint realism times when staining the novels of Nathan Asch and the earlier works of Dos Passos.

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1 Nathan Asch. The Office. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1926, p. 3.

James T. Farrell is also included as an employer of some of the Dos Passos "rockets and pinwheels":

> In "Secrets of Alexandria," and other tales, he [Saroyan] uses headlines to get effects in a cinematographic manner which Dos Passos long ago proved would get atleast one effect--that of an art surprisingly suggestive of the morning newspaper. And like the same author he has hit upon routine descriptions of brothel scenes, etc., that have become a formula with him.[1]

> Reminiscent of Dos Passos--with whom Mr. Farrell has much in common--are such cinematic devices as those in which the younger novelist [Farrell] flashes news reels upon a screen, or uses placards, carried by certain members of a protest parade, to review sardonically certain phases of contemporary life. Long slices of smurky satire are wedged into the novels [the Studs Lonigan trilogy] by means of devices which include long sermons reproduced in full for the sole purpose of denigrating religion; the whole trilogy is sandwiched with interchapters that effectively contrast the prayers and pieties of certain characters with their entirely contradictory conduct; and finally, in"Judgment Day," the stream-of-consciousness is employed to suggest a weird and phantasmagoric process of friends which Studs sees as he lies dying.[2]

In Dos Passos' U.S.A., Charley Anderson's death scene is made a little more realistic than that of Studs Lonigan in one respect: Studs is visited only by the phantoms of his friends; Charley suffers through the visitations of real flesh-and-blood acquaintances, all of whom desire money from him.

The abrupt transitions from one scene to another and from one character to another is a characteristic in the work of

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1 McCole, op. cit., p. 271.
2 op. cit., p. 281.

several of Dos Passos' contemporaries. Aldous Huxley's Point Counter Point (1928) makes use of abrupt transitions in the Dos Passos manner, and it also gives a multiplicity of points of view in a way reminiscent of Manhattan Transfer.

Louis Bromfield's Twenty-Four Hours (1930) is similar to Manhattan Transfer in its effort to portray a slice of New York City and in its use of a fairly large group of major characters to gain a multiplicity of points of view:

> Seven men and women of fashion he [Bromfield] assembles in an apartment overlooking the East River. When the party breaks up, he follows each one of them through the doings of the night and the following day--now one and then another as the hours pass. One of them becomes involved in the murder of a nightclub singer. And thus are brought in a number of underworld figures, who take their turn in the spotlight. Many other persons of humble station--like the doorman of the apartment-house--are likewise followed through the night, thus insuring a sufficient representation from the lower social levels. The principals are reassembled at tea on the following afternoon, together with some new arrivals from Europe. * * * He has limited his action to twenty-four hours, and shown a cross section of urban society.[1]

Bromfield differs widely from Dos Passos in his character handling, however, regardless of this allegedly multiple point of view technique. Bromfield does not seem too sure of just whose point of view he's treating at any specific time. In a scene in which one of the main characters, Jim Towner, goes home to tell his wife that the "other woman" he's been keeping

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1 Beach, The Twentieth Century Novel, p. 480.

in a crosstown apartment has been murdered, the point of view hops back and forth between Towner and his wife. The reader is liable to feel that the real point of view belongs to no one other than the author himself.

> As he talked he looked more and more boyish and helpless. He was like a boy trying to be bad and sophisticated who'd found himself suddenly in a mess from which he hadn't enough of experience to extricate himself; and as he talked, the sense of his helplessness and shame somehow penetrated the wall of her hardness and irritation and touched her. She saw he wasn't a bad depraved man but a helpless, rather stupid fellow who had got himself into a mess. She fought against the feeling but it didn't go away altogether.[1]

The chapter from which the foregoing passage has been selected was one which the author obviously intended to present from the wife's point of view. But the fact that "his helplessness and shame somehow penetrated the wall of her hardness and irritation and touched her" brings one to believe that the author is standing by the woman, reading her thoughts, and in turn delivering their content to the reader. Dos Passos was capable of presenting his characters on a stage with no puppet strings visible to the audience and with no commentator deemed necessary to interpret the events.

A woman novelist, Evelyn Scott, wrote a bulky volume in 1929 which she called The Wave. This has been called typical of the modern novels which use "the widespread of the social

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1 Louis Bromfield. Twenty-Four Hours. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1930, p. 295.

vision and the system of alternating groups of characters as in Wassermann and Dos Passos."[1] The Wave deals with the American Civil War in a manner that has something of the treatment Dos Passos gave the first World War in his Three Soldiers and Nineteen-Nineteen. Miss Scott includes over seventy numbered sections in her novel, each one presenting a moment in the life of a separate individual who was in some way affected by the Civil War:

> Some of these sections, especially those concerned with battles, are further broken up into subdivisions dealing with separate moments and individuals, thus bringing the total of pictures up to the number of one hundred. Few of these characters come in a second time, and practically no attempt is made to relate them to one another. Each section confines itself to the chosen individual and such other persons as he is involved with; and, with few exceptions, the point of view is strictly limited to him. The idea is to show the effect of this great political event upon the private lives of some hundreds of typical human beings--men, women, and children, soldiers and civilians, in the fighting zones, and at a distance from them.[2]

Miss Scott may have developed a "Newsreel" technique of her own before the advent of the first device of this nature appeared in The 42nd Parallel. Near the end of her novel, she heads a chapter "Excerpts from the London Daily Guardian During the Months of May and June, 1865."[3] She then includes six paragraphs of separate newspaper stories, some of which deal with the Civil War and some of which are merely typical

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1 Beach. The Twentieth Century Novel, p. 482.
2 Ibid., p. 481.
3 Evelyn Scott. The Wave. New York: The Literary Guild of America, Incorporated, 1929, p. 595.

front-page stories of civil affairs. She also dates events in her novel in a manner which Dos Passos never seems to have employed: the use of actual letters written between Lee and Grant, and between Grant and his subordinate, Halleck. Miss Scott achieves a cross-section of life even larger in scope than Dos Passos created in U.S.A., as far as characterization is concerned at any rate. The Wave includes one section devoted to the innermost thoughts of Robert E. Lee, and another section devoted to Lincoln's evening at Ford's Theater in 1865. She deals at equal length with the lowest ranking soldiers and sailors on both sides, business men and farm women remote from the sounds of battle, and even one young man who seems to be a conscientious objector who is locked in an insane asylum for his unconventional attitudes.

Another contemporary author who is said to be of the same school as Dos Passos (if the users of the Dos Passos techniques can be said to represent a literary school) is the German novelist Alfred Doblin. In his Alexanderplatz Berlin (1930), Doblin devotes a section of the novel to "a sort of inventory of human life in the neighborhood of this great center of business where Biberkopf the protagonist has taken to selling newspapers."[1]

> We have a flying view of operations for building the subway, of the various shops, insurance com-

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1 Beach. The Twentieth Century Novel, p. 513.

> panies, detective agencies, sundry legal business of a cheap lawyer; of the people who live on the second, third, and fourth floors--their occupations, diseases, domestic relations, amusements, comforts, and discomforts. There are newsreels reminding one of Dos Passos, with a lively and detailed account of murders, street-car disasters, stock-market conditions, jail-breakings, the invasion of the market by American automobiles, and of comic operas being performed at neighborhood theaters.[1]

Doblin's work is not well known in the United States, and Professor Beach is one of the few historians of the modern novel who has discussed him at any length. Even Beach does not offer any comment as to whether or not Dos Passos was an influence upon Doblin. A few facts are known: Doblin makes use of fragments of popular song and ballads as accompaniment to his narrative. Doblin, like Dos Passos, realizes some of the significance of "the obsession of these cheap and sentimental tunes, how they beat out the rhythm of our hectic and driven lives, seeming like the very beat of our pulse, the jerking of our tired nerves, the clack-clack of the belted chain that runs the machine to which we are strapped."[2]

Perhaps this last quotation is an apt recapitulation of the effect of Dos Passos' work in the novel. He has constantly emphasized the speed, the monotony, and the maladjustments which characterize twentieth century living. It may be that Dos Passos has himself fallen a victim to a distorted point of view in his efforts to create his pictures of society's ills;

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1 loc. cit.
2 Ibid., p. 14.

but hasn't the twentieth century itself been thus far a difficult time in which to say just what is the "correct" or the "right" view of anything?

CONCLUSION

It has been mentioned several times in this paper that the year 1948 is still too early a time in which to fully evaluate the lasting significance of Dos Passos' development of new literary techniques and his unique handling of old ones. His innovations have been listed and described in the foregoing chapters; criticism of his work, both affirmative and negative, has been presented. It is hoped that a student of literary history, using this paper as a guide, could gain some insight into the significance of Dos Passos' devices and some appreciation of the unusual qualities in his novels. Although the content of the author's work may not have a great degree of lasting value, it seems plausible to say that the majority of Dos Passos' techniques are worthy of serious study.

It may be that Dos Passos himself will supply the answers to the questions directed at the worth or lack of worth of his inventions. He may answer his critics in the novels and the works of non-fiction which he is now engaged in writing. Dos Passos is now fifty-two years of age; he is said to have reached and passed his peak of creative energy in the years from 1930 to 1936. This may be true; however, it will be well to watch for other Dos Passos' productions, for a man seldom refuses to read the daily newspaper forever more, arguing on the grounds that some of the events described

are of only temporary importance or that some of the happenings are only repetitions of past occurrences. Dos Passos' prose fiction is certainly more artistic than the daily journals. The structure of his novels, especially those of the U.S.A. trilogy, is outstanding: he built up a composition out of apparently unrelated elements, but all of the component parts of his works accrue to a significant pattern.

Moreover, all of Dos Passos' techniques are related to his subject--the social organism in the large:

> The author's first concern is no longer with individuals, with their precious moral problems to be met, their precious sentiments to be indulged. His first concern is with that Leviathan, society, striving weakly to adjust itself to the industrial conditions of the new world, more or less blindly struggling forward to the creation of a group consciousness and a group will. It is an unusual combination in one writer, so strong a social significance and so great a command of his craft. And it is this combination which makes Dos Passos one of the most important novelists now writing in English.[1]

Perhaps all of these flattering comments are not completely sound. Perhaps Dos Passos is the literary spokesman for the people of only two or three decades of an era. Perhaps all of the techniques which contribute to his portrait of twentieth century society are only shocking. These questions upon which critics differ widely. One thing is certain: the person who studies Dos Passos' works will not remain merely indifferent

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1 Beach, The Twentieth Century Novel, p. 511.

to them. Each of Dos Passos' technical devices has a function; each one contributes toward the author's effort to show that he has something of significance to say.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

JOHN DOS PASSOS' CONTRIBUTION OF NEW TECHNIQUES TO THE AMERICAN NOVEL

by

John Stacy Beebe
(A.B., University of California at Los Angeles, 1947)
submitted in partial fulfilment of the
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COMPREHENSIVE ABSTRACT

It is difficult to separate John Dos Passos' stylistic techniques from his political and social ideologies. In fact, his political and social ideologies were the factors which in part gave rise to the development of his literary devices. It is, therefore, to a certain extent necessary to examine his literary innovations from the point of view of how they serve his themes and purposes.

Numerous writers of the past have influenced Dos Passos even though many of his techniques seem completely original. Blaise Cendrars, the French writer of several decades ago, contributed toward Dos Passos' idea of a fictional panoramic view of life. Dos Passos was probably influenced by the work of Stephen Crane in his use of subjective impressionism and bizarre imagery. Dos Passos reflected the tendencies of the German novelist, Jakob Wassermann, who used the device of a systematic alternation of groups of characters in his novels without regard for plot. The influence of George Eliot, Carl Sandburg, and Walt Whitman is apparent in Dos Passos' work as regards the depiction of life in an industrial city. Also of significance is Dos Passos' use of naturalism and the composite view of life in the manner of Emile Zola. Dos Passos possibly inherited something from the technique of Frank Norris, whose near-epic, The Octopus, was a cross-section view of life in late nineteenth century California. From Charles Dickens Dos Passos may have borrowed ideas about a city's atmosphere

and for the portrayal of a large number of widely diversified characters. In his use of the stream-of-consciousness technique Dos Passos is indebted to two of the most famous writers of the twentieth century, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf.

Dos Passos' first novel, One Man's Initiation--1917, revealed a sort of motion picture literary technique in that the heart of a scene was flung before the reader; the transitions from one scene to another were abrupt, if not completely nonexistent.

Three Soldiers, the most significant of his first three novels, carried the motion picture technique further by the use of flash-backs, accelerated and decelerated narrative. In this work abrupt transitions were made from the point of view of one character to the point of view of another as well as from one scene to another. This war novel introduced three major characters whose almost parallel lives were seen to cross and re-cross one another in the course of their experiences in the American Expeditionary Force of 1917-1918. An allegedly objective picture of the first World War is thus given from three distinct points of view. The three American soldiers were ostensibly three different types of men, yet their reactions to the war and to Army life were almost identical. They are brought to similarly disastrous fates at the end of the book.

Manhattan Transfer brought to the reader the picture of

the City of New York. Dos Passos attempted in this work to bring into focus the life of a huge municipality. He made use of people who lived lives parallel to one another or who existed in planes of endeavor which crossed one another. He introduced other characters whose careers were not parallel nor related to the lives of anyone else. The most intimate details in the daily affairs of several dozen men and women reveal to the reader a breadthwise slice of urban humanity. Some of the characters meet each other, and their careers become enmeshed. Coincidence plays no part in these meetings; they are wrought by logical chains of events. Chapter sections dealing with the point of view of one of the major characters occur again and again. The minor characters are seen only a few times apiece; some of them come into view only once. Their relationships with the other characters are implied rather than recorded literally. The affinity between person and person is seldom definitely shown. That there is some kinship within the anonymous city crowd is shown by the author's emphasis upon the repetitiousness of each man's life; each one's existence is so much like that of all the others than an individual shares with his fellows a part of the same life.

The technique of character handling in Manhattan Transfer is naturalistic and objective. The experience of the mass populace is seen to obliterate the individual. Characters seem capable of only motor responses; their thoughts and mo-

tives are not probed deeply. Their environment may be such that only motor responses are necessary for the carrying on of their existences.

The effect of the passage of time and the relations of actual historical events to the events in the lives of the fictional characters are shown by the bits of newspaper stories, snatches of headlines, fragments of popular songs and advertisements which are interjected into the narrative proper. The apparently confused welter of unrelated events suggests the chaos of urban life in twentieth century America. Disorganization is seen as a phenomenon superior to modern hyper-developed organization. All social institutions are regarded as enslaving organisms.

The sometimes rigid objectivity in the narrative of Manhattan Transfer is relieved by the prose poems which preface each chapter. These bits of impressionism lend a subjective touch and also sound the keynotes of the themes of the chapters.

The accelerated pace of the story suggests the speed of twentieth century American life. Monosyllabic phrases and short, clipped sentences are offered as typical of American speech. Close-knit impressions are possible even in this accelerated narrative because of the stream-of-consciousness effects (especially those stream-of-consciousness sequences occurring when a specific character is shown in a state of drunkenness). The sound, color, smell, and feel of a scene

is given in fragmentary, but not incomprehensible, bits of narrative from the point of view of one character at a time. Conventional punctuation is frequently ignored; apparently unrelated phrases and sentences are employed together to give the effect of the reproduction of human thought processes. Two or more words are frequently amalgamated into one term without benefit of hyphenation. Such a term is sometimes a little scene in itself; the run-together words also contribute to the illusion of speed.

U.S.A. is the climactic effort in Dos Passos' experimentation. In this trilogy there is an increase in the number of characters and in the variety of geographical areas depicted so as to convey to the reader a sort of synthesis of the life of America. Typed characters are drawn from a wide range of social and economic levels. The technique of the sociologist is used in reproducing a complete case history of each principal character. Society is the real protagonist; the individual men and women are only elements in the social pattern.

An unconventional literary technique is employed in the treatment of the characters in that each man's (or woman's) chapters are written in a prose style commensurate with the individual's own outlook, mental level, and vocabulary. As in Manhattan Transfer, there is little analysis of the characters' motives. The people are portrayed to be defeatists, revelers in promiscuity, and sneerers at chastity. They are

superficially concerned with the problems of humanity in the large, but in reality they make their strongest efforts only to better their own personal situations.

The lack of analysis of the characters' thoughts and motives also aids in the illusion of speed. The people have no time to stop to think. They are creatures of automatic neural responses. Dialogue and expositional narrative are condensed to further this illusion of rapid motion.

The 42nd Parallel, the first novel in the trilogy, is so entitled because this particular cartographic line represents the usual path of storms traveling across the United States from west to east. New York City is roughly near the forty-second parallel. The American people, like the storms, drift to New York City, and again, like storms, they are guided not by any free will of their own, but by some omniscient and incomprehensible forces.

Nineteen Nineteen, the second novel in U.S.A., is named for the year in which the first acute pangs were felt of the spiritual disillusionment which afflicted so many individuals of the first World War generation.

The Big Money, the last novel of the trilogy, sounds the keynote for the Mammon-worship to which Dos Passos attributes some of the chief ills of civilization.

In U.S.A. three technical devices were developed to create the effect of unity and contemporaneity of author, characters, and actual historical events and personages. The

first, "Newsreel," is the name given to the several score interjectory passages which are placed in separate sections before the beginning of each chapter. Such a section introduces bits of headlines, fragments of news stories, snatches of popular songs, and political and advertising slogans of the day as a sort of device to date the events in the life of the fictional chafacter whose story precedes or follows the specific "Newsreel" section. The American people are shown to be deeply involved in hearing, seeing, and feeling the "Newsreel" elements in their everyday lives because of the strong affinity between the people and their movies, newspapers, and radios.

The second device, "The Camera Eye," introduces the author's impressions of his own life and the life around him. It reveals the events in his life which were contemporaneous with or similar to the events in the lives of the fictional characters. "The Camera Eye" sections provide a place for subjective, impressionistic artistry to relieve the monotony of objective, naturalistic narrative.

The third device, the biographical sketch, features a non-fictional, frequently ironic portrayal of the rise and/or fall of a nationally known figure of the first third of the twentieth century. The lives of these non-fictional figures contrast or compare strikingly with the lives of the fictional characters whose stories are placed alongside the biographies. The sketches analyzed as a group reveal the

purposefulness of some of the Americans who have risen to fame and fortune. The characteristics contributing to the disasters of the equally significant ill-fated figures are not revealed so clearly. The sketches of the successful people, on the other hand, symbolize the author's impression of the average American's form of hero-worship.

Dos Passos' influence upon novelists who are contemporary with him or who have come into prominence within the past few years cannot yet be ascertained with much accuracy. Some aspects of Dos Passos' techniques may prove detrimental to any writer who attempts to imitate them. For one thing, his treatment of the characterization problem did not produce genuinely life-like characters.

Dos Passos' place in the history of prose fiction will perhaps be determined largely upon his technical experiments rather than upon the grandeur of concept in his novels. But even his technical innovations may not be of lasting significance. His latest novels have proved to be fairly conventional in form and style. His The Adventures of a Young Man and Number One are individual portraits, not collective novels. His use of impressionistic techniques and rapid shifts of scene and character are more noteworthy in his latest non-fictional works than in his last two novels. There is a modicum of enlargement of the reference frame in The Adventures of a Young Man through the use of a large number of geographical areas; the biographical technique is seen in Number One in

that the whole book is a semi-fictional life story paralleling the career of the late Huey Long.

A number of contemporary novelists have been named by critics as being influenced by Dos Passos' methods. Among the writers of the present day who are using techniques which approximate those of Dos Passos are Aldous Huxley, William Saroyan, James T. Farrell, Louis Bromfield, Evelyn Scott, and Alfred Doblin. Regardless of whether or not the innovations that Dos Passos has brought to the novel are reflected in the work of such well known figures, or whether or not the innovations will be of lasting value, it does seem that Dos Passos represents a definite trend in literature--the experimentalist movement of the early twentieth century. Many writers of the future may be affected by the elements in Dos Passos' literary and social philosophies of which these experimental techniques were the expression.

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